

**THE IMPACT OF ADVANCED LEVEL GNVQ ASSESSMENT
POLICY ON FURTHER EDUCATION STUDENTS' AUTONOMY
AND MOTIVATION**

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ABSTRACT

Policy goals for lifelong learning prioritise a need to motivate people to participate in purposeful learning and to become autonomous lifelong learners. As the latest of a series of initiatives in the vocational curriculum, Advanced GNVQs adopted a controversial assessment model to achieve these aims. The implementation of the model in the further education (FE) sector has taken place at a time of protracted restructuring in colleges.

This study evaluates the effects of Advanced level GNVQ policy on students' autonomy and motivation. It focuses on the 'policy trajectory' created by the interplay between macro, meso and micro-level factors. The research developed and tested a theoretical typology to connect types of motivation and autonomy to formative assessment practices through three layers of analysis: (a) the structural and ideological context of policy for lifelong learning; (b) the particular policy debates and processes that surrounded the GNVQ assessment model and (c) the social processes of assessment within two GNVQ courses in two FE colleges. By combining these three layers, the thesis set out to relate to a tradition of policy scholarship and to contribute to the sociological study of the political, cultural, social and pedagogic roles that assessment systems play in the UK.

The study draws upon a wide range of data collection techniques, including interviews with policy-makers, teachers and students, participant observation in colleges, documentary analysis and questionnaires. It adopts multiple perspectives for analysing data to raise issues about assessment policy and practice in four broad areas. First, policy development for GNVQs shows that extreme *ad hocery*, chaos and controversy continue to beset assessment policy in the UK, particularly over what 'standards' of assessment mean. This, together with the speed of development, lack of funding and turf wars between different constituencies has created an 'assessment regime' where new forms of regulation, pedagogy and organisational practices shape meanings associated with 'autonomy' and 'motivation'.

Second, this regime affects teachers' and students' values and beliefs about vocational education and their formative assessment practices. The study argues that a combination of mechanisms for regulating teachers' assessment practices, resource pressures and student expectations about acceptable engagement with learning create and shape students' 'assessment careers'. In this respect, the study contributes evidence to a growing body of work on the social and cultural processes and effects of assessment and to research which explores learners' identities and 'learning careers'.

Third, the study highlights barriers to improving formative assessment in post-compulsory education but offers recommendations to various interested constituencies that might contribute to this goal.

Last, the study offers tentative suggestions about how current assessment policy and pedagogy' might relate to specific ideological trends associated with 'risk consciousness'.

Acknowledgements

The idea that the most enduring forms of learning are built upon social commitments to particular groups, communities and individuals is a central theme in this study of motivation and autonomy in learning. It is perhaps therefore not surprising that this has made me think in a particular way about the purpose of 'acknowledgments' in a Ph.D. It is clear what has sustained me through this study is the motivation gained from commitments to people and the social processes that flow from and encourage such commitments.

I owe a very great deal indeed to Frank Coffield's interest in this study, his meticulous feedback, his many ideas for new areas for reading and thinking, his political courage and the high standards he sets of academic work. Leslie August has supported me and taken an interest in this study way beyond the call of any best friend, and the calm, professional integrity he brings to his role in further education has long been inspiring. Julie Ecclestone is the steadiest, most supportive role model any sister could wish for. Susan Harrison probably does not know how much our conversations over 15 years about the fine detail of teaching, assessment and dealing with colleagues have inspired me to learn more about being a better teacher, assessor and colleague. Alan Harrison's humane approach to being a college principal and his commitment to students and staff development seem rarer by the day at his level in the FE sector.

The FE teachers and students in this study gave much time and showed a great deal of interest in the issues it raised. I hope my commitment to them, and my empathy with their situation transmits itself through the thesis. It goes without saying that I could not have produced the thesis without them. I also owe a great deal to the policy-makers who gave up time to talk about their involvement with GNVQ developments.

Colleagues Joanna Swann, Chris Skelton, Martain Mac an Ghaill, Tony Edwards and Ann-Marie Bathmaker show how motivating formative feedback, support and interest in a colleague's work can be. Elaine Hall, Fay Smith and Ian Hall have introduced me to the enjoyment of working collaboratively on research. Alison Straker and I were the Department's first full-time PhD students on 1 September 1997 and her intelligence, insights and affection highlight the power of informal learning when students become 'comrades in adversity'.

Last, Debbie Thornton, principal of Harrogate college and close friend, died at the age of 42 just after I submitted the thesis. Until the very end, her interest in me and 'The Ph.D', together with her belief that good research had to be accessible to 'people like her and her staff', were powerful, but now very poignant, motivators. I hope she would have rated the final product and my ideas for its dissemination.

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CHAPTER ONE

NEW KID(S) ON THE Y.O.P: THE RESEARCH ISSUES IN A PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT¹

INTRODUCTION

On a wet day in April 2000, I boarded a 'plane from Bordeaux, ready to spend the flight continuing to analyse student data from this study (see Chapter Seven), an activity that had added an intellectual dimension to a cycling trip in the south of France. With a head full of ideas about students' attitudes towards autonomy, motivation and formative assessment, I recognised immediately the airline steward welcoming us onto the plane, as Ruth², a catering student in the first lesson of my full-time teaching career in further education (FE) on the 1st February 1985. Now 33, in charge of staff training for an airline at Stanstead Airport (and with a pilot's licence), she remembered me too and, during the flight, she recalled our 'People in Organisations' lessons and the subsequent careers of her contemporaries. 'College was the best time of my life', she said, and, as music to the ears of a teacher, added 'you see, I've never stopped learning'. Since the flight was busy, she narrowly escaped an impromptu interview about her own autonomy and motivation!

This motivating, timely incident reminded me why the topic of my Ph.D. is worthwhile. Of course, Ruth and her peers knew nothing in 1985 of the political, social and educational significance of assessment initiatives during the 1970s and 1980s. More significantly, neither did I or my FE colleagues. Meeting Ruth also reminded me how the

¹ The pun in the title symbolises both my own foray into the world of post-compulsory education and the influx of a 'new type' of 16 year-old into FE and schemes for the young unemployed. 'New Kids on the Block' was also the name of a popular band in the 1980s. I've also used it because 'kids' was common parlance amongst youth workers on the Youth Opportunities Programme, intending to symbolise their 'cool' approach compared to school teachers. Looking back, it seems a patronising term (Coffield, et al, 1986).

² All names of teachers and students used in this study are pseudonyms.

beginning of my own teaching career in FE coincided with an influx of a new ‘type’ of young person into post-16 education. Unlike many of the 69% of 16 year olds for whom full-time education is now the only alternative to unemployment, low status employment schemes or poorly-paid jobs (FEFC, 1999) Ruth’s first choice was a BTEC course³

The encounter came at a key moment in this study because she reminded me how far the landscape in FE has altered almost beyond recognition since my first lesson with Ruth and her well-motivated, lively peer group in 1985⁴. Attempts to improve links between better assessment, based on growing research evidence about how this might happen, are beset by political, ideological and social problems and by lack of understanding about links between pedagogy and theories of formative assessment. Some problems seem ingrained in the peculiar assessment traditions and education politics that persist in England. Some come from FE teachers having to deal with a very diverse range of motivation and attitudes amongst 16-19 year old students whilst experiencing repeated restructuring of policy and conditions of service.

This study addresses the connections between these broader conditions, and policy, theory and practice associated with assessment systems to enhance students’ autonomy and motivation. It draws on research that evaluates the social, cultural and political functions of assessment and the effects of an inexorable growth of assessment technology on pedagogy and students’ motivation. The Ph.D. explores the impact of outcome-based assessment (OBA) on students’ autonomy and motivation through a case study of policy-making and implementation of Advanced level General National Qualifications (GNVQs). This chapter locates these aims for the study in the evolution of my own professional understanding about assessment.

³ BTEC is the acronym of the Business and Technology Education Council, formed from a merger of the Technical and Education Council and Business Education Council which were set up by the Department of Education and Science to run vocational programmes. BTEC was privatised as a commercial awarding body in 1992 in order to offer General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and merged with the University of London Examination Board in 1997 to form EdExcel. If Ruth was in FE now, her BTEC would likely be a GNVQ. A glossary of abbreviations used in this study is given in Appendix 1.

⁴ The shift in FE from work-related training for workers in diverse occupations to general vocational education and provision for the unemployed is well-documented, for example by Gleeson (1996).

Section One of this chapter charts my own emerging professional interest in formative assessment over a twenty-year period from 1979-1999. This overview sets the scene for an account in Chapter Two of the socio-economic and ideological context for assessment policy and practice and for exploring links between formative assessment, autonomy and motivation in Chapter Three.

Section Two locates the aims of the outcome-based assessment system of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in a tradition of pre-vocational education. This provides the background to a more detailed exploration of political intervention in FE in Chapter Two.

Section Three begins the process of articulating my aims as a researcher and locates these in a tradition of 'critical policy analysis'. This sets the scene for a discussion of how these aims affect epistemology in Chapter Four and methods to be used in Chapter Five.

Section Four outlines the implications of my interests for research questions to be addressed in this study.

1. MY PROFESSIONAL INTEREST IN FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

a. Good intentions, no assessment

1979 was not only a landmark in the UK's political landscape but also a catalyst for my own career. Two years after graduating with a degree in politics and history, I was briefly unemployed again as I walked out of another job I did not like. In the year of Prime Minister Thatcher's first victory, unemployed adults could get temporary work supervising unemployed 16 year olds on government schemes for the unemployed. I fell into professional life in education and training by chance when the manager of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) new Youth Opportunities Programme scheme (YOP) 'took a gamble' on my personality (as she later told me) and appointed me as one

of two 'supervisors' in 'social and life skills' (SLSS)⁵. My grammar school experience, followed immediately by university, meant that I had never come across school-leavers being displaced in huge numbers from unskilled jobs by the economic crisis of the 1970s, let alone seen myself as having anything to offer them. I had only the vaguest notions of what SLSS could or should be.

YOP was introduced in 1978.⁶ Funded by the Employment Department (ED), through the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and run by a very diverse range of providers, such schemes offered a range of uncertificated work and community experience combined with SLSS programmes. The SLSS day release and block week programmes I designed and ran for 'the trainees' fitted around work experience placements during a twelve-month scheme. Most young people on YOP had no qualifications and there were disproportionate numbers from ethnic minorities. The SLSS programmes they had to do tended to adopt the affective, group work skills of youth and community workers, deploying a good deal of genuine care and understanding, games, quizzes, role plays, group work and some *ad hoc* literacy and numeracy. Meaningful assessment and useful progression were not part of this short-term response to mass youth unemployment⁷

But there was not just an absence of summative assessment. There was no diagnosis of needs, action planning or recording achievement, either. Young people came, they (mostly) attended their work experience placements, did their interview role-plays, practised filling in application forms and writing letters for jobs, discussed contraception, drugs, health, relationships, went on visits to diverse places of interest, railed at their fate (or passively accepted it) and then left. These salutary recollections show that, although training schemes have improved since these emergency programmes were introduced,

⁵ A diverse range of private, public, charitable and voluntary organisations could bid to the Manpower Services Commission to run YOPs. However, commitment to Christian values was not a condition of my employment.

⁶ See Appendix 1 for a chronology of initiatives leading up to the introduction of GNVQs in 1992.

⁷ By the mid-1980s, such schemes, with their breadline training allowance, were the only alternatives in many areas to the dole (see Coffield et al, 1986). By 1997, the year I began the PhD, mass youth unemployment is obscured by the fact that 69% of 16 year olds now stay on in full-time education. Figures for participation in various post-16 options are discussed in Section 2.

twenty years later, much remains to be done in order to offer meaningful training and education and useful accreditation for these young people (see Evans et al, 1997).

For six years, I worked with young unemployed people in Birmingham, part-time in colleges in Rotherham and then full-time for a Youth Training scheme (YTS)⁸ run by Rotherham local education authority (LEA). I was particularly influenced by youth work traditions and by a developing genre of education that responded to the growth of SLSS and the raising of the school leaving age in 1975. In-service courses proselytised transactional analysis, counselling, group work, personal and social education and an affective, no-assessment approach (see, for example, Hopson and Scally, 1982). Absence of credible assessment was reinforced by the marginalisation of unemployment schemes in FE colleges where schemes and Unified Vocational Preparation programmes for young workers often had separate staff on temporary contracts and separate accommodation.

In this context, like many youth workers, if I thought of assessment at all, I saw it as the cause of failure, stigmatisation and de-motivation for the young people I worked with. And, like many middle-class successes of the system, I had never realised that schooling was so negative for so many. My own experience of assessment had been to care only that I got good grades. Another salutary recollection is that a two year part-time Certificate in Education for further education teachers from 1982-1984 at Huddersfield Polytechnic did nothing to alleviate my ignorance about assessment. So, although I did not know then what 'pedagogy' or 'summative assessment' were, I fitted the image Kenneth Clarke conjured up in 1991:

...the British pedagogue's hostility to written examinations of any kind can be taken to ludicrous extremes...This opposition to testing and examinations is largely based on folk memory in the Left about the old debate on the 11-plus and grammar schools... (Clarke, cited by Black, 1995).

⁸ YOP became YTS in 1982.

b. The rise of vocationalism

Despite my ignorance, I became aware, slowly, of tensions in my role. A Marxist lecturer on the Certificate in Education in 1982 inspired me to examine the political and ideological context of youth unemployment schemes. I came to recognise the inequalities of the system and to see the official emphasis in SLSS as designed to blame young people for their own unemployment and to obscure the structural conditions that affected their prospects⁹. My views were politicised in a YTS scheme in Rotherham at the height of the miners' strike where many young people, not usually interested in a socio-political context (Coffield et al, 1986), had parents active in the strike and wanted to discuss current issues. In response, staff teaching SLSS on the scheme had a strong commitment to negotiating a curriculum with young people to cover a wide range of social, political, personal, leisure pursuits and work-related issues. General and liberal studies were prominent in further education during the early 1980s and many tutors in YOP/YTS schemes funded by LEAs could interpret SLSS very liberally. This liberalism clearly worried the then MSC because it issued a directive in 1983 forbidding political and social dimensions to be covered in SLSS programmes¹⁰. Nevertheless, feedback showed that the curriculum which colleagues and I constructed was relevant, interesting and genuinely experiential. Yet it did not prepare young people formally for progression to employment or FE and it did not see their work experience as a potential site for exploration of issues. Instead, it reflected the separation of general and vocational education that characterised FE during the 1970s and 1980s¹¹.

⁹ Some researchers saw such schemes as a form of 'warehousing' (Coffield et al, 1986).

¹⁰ In the absence of any monitoring or inspection, we ignored the directive.

¹¹ Liberal studies, promoted by the City and Guilds of London Institute during the 1960s and 1970s for day-release students, had the aim of a strong 'arts, music and culture' immersion for working class young people. It was often appropriated by individual teachers or teams for a diverse range of purposes, from film studies, elective studies, life and social skills to political education. It has been satirised realistically by Tom Sharpe and his accounts of teaching 'Meat V'. In the 1980s, many colleges adopted the more 'applied' approach of 'Communication Studies', alongside the 'Personal, Health and Social Education' component of the TVEI initiative. In the 1990s, there is no extra-curricular provision in further education colleges' vocational programmes. The situation is better in sixth form colleges which often have 'elective' studies.

In this respect, the staff team reflected different strands of liberal humanism and progressive educational traditions where, as Helsby argues, educational values are dominated by belief in “*the intrinsic, non-instrumental value of education, a distrust of vocational studies and an antipathy towards technical education*” (1999, p16) and a commitment to ‘progressive’ pedagogy. This tradition prioritises generic and interpersonal skills together with exposure of young people to ‘critical’ ideas about the political and socio-economic context that affects their lives (see Bates et al, 1998).

In 1985 I moved to a permanent job in mainstream FE, teaching day release students, full-time BTEC students and adults on vocational and Access to Higher Education programmes. Although I aimed for lessons to be relevant and interesting, students gained nothing in general studies to record formally as achievements. And although my students had much ‘genuine positive regard’ from me (Rogers 1986), and some challenging lessons, I think most of it merely entertained them between more vocationally relevant parts of their courses.

Meanwhile, a large-scale incursion of vocational curricula into schools began through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), overseen by the MSC from 1982 until 1989, run through the LEAs and tellingly described by David Young, then chair of the MSC, as a ‘dawn raid on education’. (Young, 1990). The origins of centralised assessment policy, including the National Curriculum are evident in the TVEI (see Helsby, 1999). It offered vocational and technical education for 14-18 year olds, both within mainstream subjects and as separate options and established partnerships between local colleges and schools. In many areas, LEAs connected it with the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE), introduced by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in 1985 as a belated competitor to the TVEI (Radnor et al, 1989)¹². CPVE provided general vocational preparation as a basis for further study or employment, became the Diploma of Vocational Education in 1987 and was withdrawn

¹² The DES became the Department for Education in 1988 and merged with the Employment Department in 1995 to form the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in 1995.

in 1991 to pave the way for GNVQs. Like many who made their FE careers through funded initiatives, I became co-ordinator of a new seven school/college consortium in 1985 to offer a CPVE programme for 100 students. I saw this new initiative, with its proselytising of vocational relevance and formative assessment, as a progressive way to motivate students who would otherwise not stay on in education.

The rise of vocational relevance in general education accompanied a the demise of commitment to liberal studies and general education in vocational courses (see Pring, 1995; Yeomans, 1998). Despite such concerns, like many supporters of pre-vocational programmes, I saw personal development through preparation for the world of work as unproblematic. My experience of YOP and YTS also made me disdainful of what I saw as 'academic elitism' in A-levels and 'boring' teacher-centred methods. I was therefore heavily steeped in the 'student-centred' pedagogy, with its emphasis on affective dimensions to learning, that accompanied a polarisation between 'progressive' vocational teachers and 'conservative' academic ones (A. Hargreaves, 1989), noted also by Inge Bates (1998a) in her account of GNVQs.

Just as I did not mourn the demise of general education in vocational programmes, I did not recognise the possibility that learners might not gain cognitive and intellectual skills if curriculum content and pedagogy prioritised softer aspects of learning and learners' individual experience (Hargreaves, 1989; Avis, 1995a). In a similar vein, Stephen Ball (1990) argues that motivational forms of assessment "*celebrate self-realisation and personal awareness*" but exclude interest in 'deeper structures' of personal development in a social context (1990, p83) while 'bureaucratically mystified' assessment systems preoccupy teachers and students with minutiae (Hargreaves and Reynolds, 1989, p58).

c. From pre-vocational education to lifelong learning

CPVE can be seen as one of the first 'bureaucratic' assessment systems in FE because of its complex outcome-based assessment (OBA) specifications. It was also the first mainstream qualification to use assessment overtly to motivate students, in parallel with

an initiative set up by the DES to introduce Records of Achievement (RoAs) in schools. In contrast to situations where resources for CPVE were, as Radnor et al describe, scarce or non-existent (1989), some LEAs (including the one I worked for) resourced and connected CPVE, TVEI and RoAs and regional staff and curriculum development in relation to assessment flourished.

Yet, despite extended opportunities for in-service reflection, another salutary recollection is that my insights at that time were uninformed by theoretical analysis. Like most teachers, I derived ideas about assessment from the particular formats I used, without making explicit connections between them. Although I began to apply ideas from RoA developments to other courses, before CPVE, I treated each assessment system separately. This fragmentation is reinforced by lack of understanding about assessment throughout schools (Black and Wiliam, 1998a) and FE (Ecclestone, 1996a).

Notwithstanding my lack of theoretical insights about assessment (or managing educational change for that matter!), I was responsible between 1985 and 1991 for a great deal of college and regional staff development relating to RoAs, profiling and unit-based assessment. Importantly, I learnt what 'ipsative' (self-referenced) assessment was (a term which is still little understood). I was particularly enthusiastic about how formative assessment could motivate disaffected learners and was particularly well-disposed to the progressive intentions of records of achievement and profiling, evaluated in Broadfoot (1986) but which I did not read until 1991.

A Masters degree in Education at Manchester University between 1989 and 1991 opened up a new world of understanding about assessment and professional learning. Like my Certificate in Education, the LEA paid for the MA and allowed me day release from work, confirming how those who benefit from the education system have often had repeated opportunities to succeed (Keep 1997; Coffield, 1999a). In addition, professional autonomy was taken for granted and my managers did not determine the focus of assignments during either the Certificate or the MA. This contrasts with many of my current in-service degree, MEd and taught doctorate students, most of whom pay their

own fees, get no time off work to study and are directed to focus on institutional initiatives.

I finished working with young people when I moved in 1991 to the Unit for the Development of Adult and Continuing Education (UDACE, part of the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE). In a context of optimism about developments in National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), UDACE, NIACE and the Further Education Unit (FEU)¹³ were pioneering outcome and credit-based assessment as both a political and educational key to widen access to formal learning for adult learners (UDACE, 1989; 1994; Jessup, 1991). In the early 1990s, Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning was moving from the margins of access and adult education programmes into NVQs and some university credit systems. There was much technical and ideological promise in the air that these forms of assessment could motivate adults and widen access by accrediting diverse achievements (see Jessup 1991, McNair 1995). I was involved in research to support these developments (Ecclestone, 1993a; Ecclestone, 1994a; NIACE, 1993; FEU, 1995) and this advanced my theoretical and practical insights in leaps and bounds.

There were also moves in the early 1990s to extend assessment to non-accredited provision. I worked with adult educators in London to define learning outcomes from non-accredited, LEA-funded programmes.¹⁴ Some were reluctant, seeing the process of defining outcomes as constraining liberal education. In keeping with the prevailing view in bodies like UDACE and the FEU, I tended to see this resistance as reluctance to surrender control over assessment, a simplistic view that still persists in discussions about OBA (see, for example, Steadman, 1995).

Moves began in 1993 to change professional development programmes for post-16 teachers and trainers into NVQs. I moved to Sheffield Hallam University to contribute to

¹³ This became the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) in 1994.

¹⁴ As I revise this chapter for the last time (August 2000), this debate is re-emerging as organisations like the Workers Education Association consider their role under the new Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) (Hayes et al, 2000).

FE teacher training programmes and began to write about the impact of accreditation, and the effects of NVQs on professional learning, criticising the creeping centralisation of prescriptive outcomes as a strait-jacket on learning, assessment and the content of programmes (Ecclestone, 1994b).

In 1994, a seminar run by Caroline Gipps on formative assessment was another pivotal moment in my understanding about assessment. Ideas about formative and diagnostic assessment, effective feedback from teachers and the involvement of students in action planning, self-assessment and reviewing achievement are now well-theorised and reviewed in Chapter Three. Despite my interest, I did not then relate the importance of assessment systems to a socio-political analysis (Broadfoot, 1996) or to socio-cultural dimensions of assessment in FE. This Ph.D. aims to close that gap.

d. Tensions and dilemmas

Now that I appreciate more about the complexities of formative assessment, I also recognise numerous tensions in my understanding and assessment practices over twenty years. During CPVE, for example, I was sometimes uneasy about how apparently ‘empowering’ forms of assessment exposed some students’ vulnerability. Encouraged to reflect about their learning through RoAs, some revealed difficult aspects of their personal life too. In retrospect, I see these features of assessment as empowering in some respects, but also as ways of controlling students (Hargreaves, 1989). The tiny minority of students who rebelled against assessment in CPVE in my college did see it as controlling, patronising and intrusive - and said so. In the light of the themes of this study, colleagues and I saw this form of autonomy as a hindrance to getting students through the assessment requirements! From a Foucauldian perspective, the bureaucratic forms of assessment in CPVE, NVQs and GNVQs can be seen as simultaneously empowering students through increased self-awareness whilst controlling them through externally-monitored self-regulation. This masks how limited are the choices available to them (Edwards and Usher, 1994a).

However, an important justification for increased political control of assessment is that better assessment enhances students' autonomy and motivation and encourages, or forces, teachers to adopt student-centred pedagogy (see, for example, Oates and Harkin, 1995). Following this argument, if assessment is motivating whilst also rigorous and accountable, standards and rates of achievement should rise. Yet, this dual aim seems incompatible in the UK where increased achievement is accompanied by fears about 'falling standards', and where tensions remain between norm-referencing for selection and criterion-referencing for achievement. Perhaps they are unresolvable in a capitalist system where assessment must raise standards, select people for limited places in worthwhile jobs or educational opportunities, *and* at the same time widen access to formal recognition of achievements and motivate people for lifelong learning (see also Young, 1998; Coffield, 1997a; Broadfoot and Pollard, 2000). As discussion in Chapter Three shows, assessment systems are required to play politically-charged and conflicting roles.

One problem evident in my role at UDAE is that debate about such tensions is stifled by preoccupation with the 'technology' of OBA and qualification frameworks. This reflects a broader obsession for measuring outcomes through extreme forms of technical rationality and 'performativity' (see Broadfoot, 1999). Despite hopes that such moves will simultaneously promote parity of esteem and raise standards of achievement, this complex technology masks clearly segregated tracks to different destinations for employment and education (A. Hargreaves, 1989; Coffield and Williamson, 1997; Ainley, 1999). Assessment technology also masks the growing fusion in policy rhetoric of 'achievement' and 'lifelong learning' with accreditation. I remember speaking at a NIACE national conference in 1992 where questioning the effects of this trend attracted criticism that it was elitist for those already successful in accreditation to suggest that it might disempower adults who were not.

In this context, a fundamental question is whether assessment policy reinforces instrumental credentialism and differentiation or motivates people for a long life of

autonomy and intrinsic interest in achievement. The impact of different assessment systems on motivation, and the types of autonomy they encourage people to develop, is a significant problem that motivated me to do this Ph.D.

In addition to these broader concerns, more subtle difficulties arise from using formative assessment. An action research project with colleagues in different disciplines at Sunderland University in 1997 showed that attempts by teachers to improve their formative feedback on students' work were affected by two potentially contradictory motives. Teachers articulated, and genuinely believed, that improving their formative assessment would help students improve their work: such intentions are what Argyris and Schon (1974) refer to as 'espoused theories'. In contrast, 'theories-in-use' are tacit motives that are revealed only through action. These emerged in the project as teachers' desire to protect themselves against challenges about grades by students, colleagues or external examiners. Outcomes, assessment criteria, grade descriptors and better oral and written feedback can therefore arise from a constructivist partnership between teachers and students to improve learning (Gipps, 1994). Conversely, they can encourage defensiveness, where such features become checklists to cover gaps in understanding, as well as pre-empting transgression from prescribed procedures. When grades have high stakes, and where teachers are both facilitators of learning and gatekeepers for access to the next stage of progression, this tension between assessment roles can be acute (see Ecclestone and Swann, 1999).

A related tension relates to learning processes themselves. GNVQ grading criteria, for example, aim to encourage students' autonomy in planning and managing their work and evaluating its quality (see Section Two). Similarly, on an in-service degree course for which I was responsible between 1993 and 1999, I introduced detailed guidelines about which qualities in assignments and dissertations attracted different grades. Yet students' responses sometimes showed that such guidelines, especially when combined with exemplar materials of the required standard, gave unrealistic expectations about, for example, the skills involved in critical analysis.

Such expectations aim to make accessible what is being asked of students and encourage teachers to give students more information to explain their grades and how they should improve next time. Yet, this can also become a form of coaching to mimic the skill rather than really internalising it. In a context of widening participation, teachers are expected to assess rigorously whilst supporting students who may be wary of assessment but who are under pressure to get good grades in a competitive job market. This can create pressures for coaching (see Keep, 1997; Ecclestone and Swann, 1998; Swann and Arthurs, 1999).

These reflections raise questions about the effects of assessment systems on relationships between teachers and students, and between students. Reflections here also suggest that political and professional notions of 'autonomy' and 'motivation' can easily assume the status of '*mantric affirmations of belief*' (Ball, 1995, p268) rather than being a carefully conceptualised basis for improving formative assessment practices.

2. THE AIMS OF GNVQs

a. Autonomy in OBA systems

GNVQs are the latest of a series of initiatives to motivate more 16 year-olds to stay on in full-time education. They were announced in the 1992 election manifesto and introduced by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in 1992 after nine months of development. They were introduced by the DfE but managed and funded until 1995 by the ED. They were introduced initially at Advanced and Intermediate (Key stage 4) levels as a parallel to job-specific NVQs and to provide a route into higher education. Between 1992 and 1999, they were developed in a rolling programme of 14 vocational areas at three levels (Foundation and Intermediate (post-14 and post-16) and Advanced

(post-16)¹⁵. They have been re-launched as ‘vocational GCSEs’ (Intermediate GNVQ) and ‘vocational A-levels (Advanced).

Their role in the post-16 curriculum is partly an outcome of the way in which youth unemployment is obscured by participation in education and training. The current figure of 69% participation in full-time post-16 education is split 34% in schools and 35% between FE and sixth form colleges. A further 7% go into employment training schemes and 7.6% go into part-time education, leaving about 15% unemployed and without social security benefit. The total participation rate of 84.8% at 16 drops to 77.4% at 17 (FEFC, 1999a). In the north east where my study takes place, participation in full-time education is 62% while participation in training has dropped from 12.7% in 1997 to 9.8% in 1999 (OFSTED, 2000).

The government’s intention in 1993 was that 25% of all 16 year-olds would take Advanced GNVQ by 1997 and that they should have a strong profile in the FE sector (FE and sixth form colleges) and schools. Across the FE sector, 24% take Advanced GNVQ while 46% take GCE A-levels (FEFC, 2000). Total recruitment to A-levels outnumbers that in GNVQs by 8 to 1: 800,000 compared to 100, 000 in 1999 (TES, 2000; also Spours, 1997). There has also been criticism of poor retention and completion (Wolf, 1997). However, it is difficult to calculate exact figures for these features since the way in which participation is calculated was changed in 1996 from ‘registered’ to ‘active’ students (ie. those who are still on the course after one year) (see Appendix 3). In 1997, there were 74, 835 students ‘active’ on Advanced GNVQ, rising to 83, 402 in 1999. However, active students at Advanced level fell in 2000 by 10,000 students (TES, 2000).

Of Advanced registrations in 1997 in the FE sector, 85% were in FE colleges and 15% in 6th form colleges and 75% of all Advanced GNVQs are offered between FE colleges and 6th form colleges. 70% of FE college registrations are with Edexcel (formerly BTEC) (FEFC, 2000).¹⁶ GNVQs have not made a great impact in schools where a small number

¹⁵ Although GNVQs play an important role in the post-14 curriculum, this study focuses on GNVQs at Advanced level, a decision discussed in Chapter Five.

¹⁶ The implications of these figures for choice of site and sample are discussed in Chapter Five.

of subjects are offered in small cohorts (Wolf, 1997a). In 1996, 75% of those completing Advanced GNVQ applied to university for degrees or Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and of these, almost two-thirds had offers for HNDs. Intermediate GNVQ has also become an important route into Advanced GNVQs: of those who complete the Intermediate, 75% go onto further study. Finally, it is important to note that, despite 14 subjects offered at Advanced level, four of the original five (Business, Health and Social Care, Leisure and Tourism, Art and Design) dominate recruitment, taking over 75% of all students (Wolf, 1997a). In addition to a drop in overall recruitment, engineering, IT and Manufacturing have lower numbers than ever (Times, 2000).

In addition to NCVQ's goal that GNVQ would form a major track in the post-16 curriculum (Spours, 1997) the assessment model was especially contentious. Sources and reasons for dissent are analysed in Chapter Six. GNVQs challenged powerful traditions of norm-referenced, examination-based assessment and learning that does not lead to recognition of achievement. They also raised questions about the balance between teacher (internal) and external assessment similar to those which have dogged the National Curriculum (see Wilmut, 1999). More broadly, GNVQs were seen to address diverse and conflicting problems: masking youth unemployment; motivating learners who would otherwise not stay on in post-16 education or who were disaffected in Key Stage 4; expanding routes into higher education; preparing young people for work; offering a parallel to job-specific NVQs; keeping 'less-able' students from undermining standards in A-levels (and later, in GCSEs); offering parity of esteem with A-levels; ameliorating poor levels of achievement in numeracy and literacy and creating a more unified post-16 curriculum¹⁷.

The cumulative effect of such pressures has been to place different demands on the GNVQ assessment system which has had to: select people for limited places at the next level of education (and employment); satisfy political and public demands for 'parity of esteem' with long-established qualifications; motivate learners by rewarding diverse

¹⁷ For extended discussion of tensions in the vocational curriculum, see Gleeson and Hodkinson, 1995; Edwards et al, 1997; Wolf, 1997b, and for broader issues in unified and single-track curricula, Hodson and Spours 1997; Young 1998.

achievements; compensate for deficiencies earlier in the system; respond to learners' expressed interests; satisfy demands from different constituencies to include 'essential' content and skills.

Deriving from principles in the TVEI and CPVE, such as unit assessment and portfolios of achievement, GNVQs were influenced heavily by the competence-based model of NVQs. Between 1993 and 2000, the assessment model has undergone three major revisions, accompanied by numerous pilots of new specifications¹⁸. The 1993 and 1995 models were based on specifications of outcomes and criteria, assessable units, and key skills of communication, information technology and numeracy integrated into subject content rather than taught and assessed separately. Designers intended initially that achievement would be ungraded, assessed through a portfolio, with evidence accumulated through 'naturally occurring' and vocationally-relevant activities, designed locally by teachers around the outcomes. External tests and grading were imposed by ministers (see Williams, 1999), sparking debates about the balance between internal and external assessment, different interpretations of 'standards', and about whether achievement can be based on 'mastery' of all outcomes. The NCVQ adopted a criterion-referenced grading scheme, based on criteria for planning and evaluating one's work and working with others.

Although none of these features are unique in themselves, the profound political and pedagogical challenge was to combine them in a mainstream qualification intended to have parity of esteem with traditional forms of assessment in A-levels.

b. Autonomy and motivation in GNVQs

Despite conflicting aims, GNVQs reflect a water shed in two key respects. First, NCVQ claimed them as the most extensive application of OBA in the world (Hillier, 1996) and the first large-scale attempt to apply portfolio-based assessment (see Wolf, 1998).

¹⁸ Specific characteristics of the four models in GNVQs between 1992 and 2000 are examined in Chapter Three and analysis of their policy processes and the debates that accompanied them is presented in Chapter Six. A chronology of developments in GNVQ assessment policy is given in Appendix 17.

Second, they were the first coherent attempt in the post-compulsory curriculum in England and Wales to use an assessment model in order to enhance students' autonomy and motivation for learning. As an introduction to the evaluation in this study of both the policy itself and its effects on students' motivation and autonomy, this section summarises claims from the literature¹⁹ that OBA increases autonomy and motivation:

- (a) teachers and students can design relevant learning assignments and assessment evidence to meet the required outcomes
- (b) assignments are more 'student-centred' through a focus on individual interests and needs and by involving activities associated with 'active' learning (such as research projects)
- (c) students can determine their pace of work and receive short-term, interim feedback on progress
- (d) students can assess their own effectiveness in planning, executing and evaluating their work (these qualities are built into the GNVQ grading criteria)
- (e) the processes of reviewing and recording achievement and setting targets for learning encourages students to take more control over their learning
- (f) teachers have to share the basis of their assessment decisions with students and negotiate appropriate evidence of achievement
- (g) knowledge of outcomes enables students to plan progression both within a programme and to the next stage of education or employment
- (h) an upbeat public focus on achievement and opportunities to succeed erodes traditional associations of assessment with selection and norm-referencing.

These features create a dichotomy between learner autonomy and the traditional power of teachers, examining bodies and institutions, and between 'traditional' teaching methods and 'active learning' suggested by projects and other investigative activities.

Individuality, personal development and autonomy are integral to this:

¹⁹ For example, UDACE, 1994; Burke., 1995; Jessup, 1991.

..the outcomes model is based on the assumption that learning is a personal and individual experience and that to standardise it by adopting specific modes and time periods is not an effective means for a group to achieve a set of learning outcomes. Individuals need to manage their own learning experiences in a manner which recognises where they start from their preferred styles and modes of learning and the time and opportunities they have for learning.. (Jessup, 1995a, p34).

Specifications of learning outcomes shift attention from traditional course structures and teaching inputs, to *"what is actually learned"* (UDACE, 1994, p4). OBA concentrates on effective ways for individuals to achieve the outcomes and contrasts unfavourably with time-serving, formal attendance and undemocratic assessment implicit in criticism of *"..a tutor-led system with fuzzy objectives and undisclosed criteria.."* (Otter, 1995). An important aim in NVQs and GNVQs was to shift attention away from teachers:

There seems to be an assumption that educators exert proprietary control over the process of learning...Yet if anyone can exercise control over the process of learning, it is the individual. It is only the learner who can make sense of the diverse inputs he or she receives (Jessup, 1991, p4)

OBA therefore offers a myriad of often implicit perspectives on autonomy and motivation, intertwined with notions of self reliance, flexibility and responsibility and what Bates calls the *"self-steering subject"* (1998a). Claims here resonate with those made for modernising teaching and assessment in higher education (see Boud, 1988; National Commission, 1997).

As Chapter Three shows, emphasis on individuals overlooks social dimensions of learning and the complexities of negotiation between teachers and students over assessment and learning. In addition, examination of possible outlets for public discussion about how autonomy and motivation might be realised in practice shows that, outside the supportive literature cited above, articulation of these aims has been vague. Nevertheless, notions of autonomy and motivation underpin:

- grading criteria in the pre-1995 assessment specifications (Jessup, 1994)

- assignment briefs from QCA for externally assessed 'set assignments' in the 1996 pilot model of new specifications for Curriculum 2000
- teachers' own assignment briefs
- exemplars of good and poor work in the QCA's 'standards' management kits', produced to assist teachers in moderating candidates' work for the 1995 model
- subject unit assessment criteria in the post-1996 model which are now the basis for the model in Curriculum 2000
- general advice and guidance to teachers and students from the NCVQ, QCA and awarding bodies (for example, NCVQ, 1995; QCA, 1998)
- commercial text books
- inspection reports by FEFC (1994, 1996) OFSTED (1995, 1997) and the latest (OFSTED/FEFC 1999), as a joint evaluation of the 1996 pilot of new specifications.

Advice to students emphasises general activities:

Ways of working

GNVQs give you an opportunity to try out all sorts of ways of working, for example:

working on your own and as part of a team

doing short projects and longer assignments

looking into processes and products, planning and organising events, designing products and services

getting work experience

Generally, you are expected to take responsibility for your own learning, for example, deciding what to do and how to go about it. (Mandatory unit guidance booklet, QCA, 1997, my emphasis).

In the light of these general portrayals of the autonomy and motivation that GNVQs might encourage, it is important to develop an analytical framework for characterising them. This can then be used to evaluate empirically how they appear in policy development of the assessment model and the debates that surrounded its implementation, and in assessment practices in FE colleges. I do this in Chapter Three.

3. BECOMING A CRITICAL POLICY ANALYST

a. 'Policy scholarship'

Two broad aims underpinned this study from the outset. First was a desire to evaluate current directions in assessment policy and then to go beyond academic fault-finding in order to offer a more rational basis for improving the links between assessment and learning in post-compulsory education. As Paul Black argues:

..the 'educational establishment' is more competent at criticism and analysis than at providing a positive platform...One feature the New Right might invoke to support its suspicions about conspiracy is that its opponents have not set out a clear case to compare with their own... (1995, p15).

This is, ultimately, a modernist mission. Although the research does not seek 'universal truths', it rests on a belief, perhaps a futile hope (Hammersley, 1994), that rational argument might improve policy and persuade qualification designers, teachers and researchers of drawbacks to existing approaches and the need to find ways to improve them. Second, a deeper commitment lies behind these hopes: to promote forms of learning and assessment that are genuinely empowering, inspiring and motivating. Implicit in this aim is a fear that lifelong participation in formal learning could end up as an instrumental, individualistic and self-regulating experience for many people, rather than transforming, social and intrinsically motivating.

Nevertheless, there is a need to avoid setting up a straw opponent for criticism without constructive alternatives, although even this aim is contentious. In particular, it can seem to call over-liberally for 'understanding' between academic researchers and policy-makers (see Hammersley, 2000), or legitimise, inadvertently, the atomisation and fragmentation caused by government policy. To counter the latter danger, Geoff Whitty and Tony Edwards argue that policy research should focus on:

the origins, implementation and effects of specific policies, but [also explore] how they are positioned in relation to other policies, and even how they can be understood in terms of changing modes of social solidarity and changing modes of regulation in contemporary societies. (Whitty and Edwards, 1994, p29)

Contextualisation in this study aims to relate conflicting ideologies in assessment policy to deeper changes in public policy values. In doing so, it explores overt and subtle forms of regulation of learning through assessment policy. This aim is important because a common view in a substantial literature of education policy analysis is that twenty years of Conservative policy in the UK made significant breaks with the past at all levels of the system. Ruptures affect arrangements to implement policy, the ideological purposes of education, and the nature of political intervention in the curriculum. Yet, there is also a need to recognise enduring trends, if *“only to overcome historical provincialism: the assumption that the present is a sort of autonomous creation”* (Mills, 1970, p151).

As Ball (1997) points out, much educational research has a timeless, ahistorical feel to it, where a particular initiative appears uprooted both from what went before it, and in a wider sense, unaffected by other shifts in ideology and values in public policy. For him, this leads to analyses which are dictated only by educational preoccupations and principles (Ball, 1997, p265). It is therefore important for policy analysis to examine imperatives which give apparently disparate initiatives a general coherence. At the same time, policy-making, particularly for the post-16 curriculum, is extraordinarily complex and hidden. Researchers need, therefore, to be aware of different levels, constituencies and processes surrounding an initiative since the ways in which policies are communicated and interpreted are far from straight-forward. Without this awareness, *“the empirically rich under-life to policy intention”* remains under-theorised (Ball, 1992, p19).

Arising from a research tradition of 'policy scholarship', precise and wide-ranging contextualisation seeks to avoid 'policy science' where a *“sharply focused concern with the specifics of a particular set of policy initiatives”* (Grace cited by Whitty and Edwards 1994, p28) excludes the impact of wider contextual relationships. This traps researchers

in the assumptions of a specific policy context. Yet, notwithstanding the potential rigour of policy scholarship, there is also an inherent danger in trying to be too ambitious in contextualisation. Perhaps more realistically as Whitty and Edwards point out:

in practice few of us get so obsessed with the detail that we lose sight of the need to locate it in the bigger picture and few of us engage in flights of pure theoretical fancy. We tend to occupy the middle ground struggling to put it all together... (op cit. p29)

Without a commitment to policy scholarship, it is easy for research to over-simplify and over-rationalise policy directions and their underlying imperatives and then to emphasise the technical aspects of their implementation. Similarly, this pitfall can extend to analysis of how teachers and learners translate policy into classroom practice. Malen and Knapp (1997) argue that it is easy, for example, to portray policy as so powerful that it can severely constrain students, teachers and institutional managers, or, on the other hand, so powerless that it can be subverted, ignored or neutralised in everyday practice.

So, although research can map and decipher policy trends, it is important to recognise that policy, far from being either conspiratorial or carefully constructed, is often conceptually chaotic and contradictory (Dale, 1994). A new assessment model for Vocational A-levels in September 2000 reflects the extreme pressures explored in this study and the analysis offered by the study accounts for a policy development at a pivotal moment of transition, namely the creation of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (see Appendix 1).

In addition to examining the creation of policy in a wider ideological and political context, it is important to consider the complex variables that affect the meso and micro levels of day-to-day implementation in institutions. Such consideration explores the ways in which policy is read, taken account of, or ignored and how these are affected by the idiosyncrasies of micro-political factors in particular institutional settings (Ball, 1994). This means that:

policy analysis needs to be accompanied by careful regional, local and organisational research if we are to understand the degrees of 'play' and 'room for manoeuvre' in the translation of policies to practices. (Ball, 1997, p262)

Yet, the interaction of macro, meso and micro factors mean that, somehow, this study must provide meaningful complexity rather than an aimless and jumbled eclecticism.

b. Developing a surface epistemology

Aims and concerns outlined so far relate to a tradition of what Gerald Grace calls 'policy scholarship' (1994), where researchers contextualise policy within ideological, structural and political changes (see Chapter Four). A case study of GNVQs, based on policy scholarship, might add to an understanding of macro level social and political roles for assessment and meso and micro level socio-cultural dimensions (for example, Broadfoot, 1996; Filer, 2000). A focus on post-compulsory education, rather than schools or higher education, which are already well-researched, will, hopefully, extend this understanding.

In trying to achieve these aims, the research will acknowledge post-modernist criticism of them and their implications for methodology. A Ph.D. must demonstrate a competent grasp of 'deep epistemology' (Ball, 1997) as the philosophical basis for research methods, discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Early in the study, I set deep epistemology aside in order to engage with what Ball calls 'surface epistemology'

the relationships between conceptualisation, research conduct and design and interpretation (which allows) for at least some recognition of the social and personal aspects and agendas of research..." (Ball, 1997, p258)

This approach is compelling as a pre-cursor to examining deep epistemology because Ball's reflective analysis of traps into which his own research has sometimes fallen is unusually open and implicates other policy researchers too. Yet, the task in a PhD of

addressing contemporary dilemmas for educational researchers is made more difficult by the ways in which labels of ideological or political positions are becoming more slippery as old certainties disappear. Certain positions, such as that of 'critical policy analyst', also imply an increasingly uncomfortable moral high ground:

Policy research is always in some degree both reactive and parasitic. Careers and reputations are made as our research flourishes on the rotting remains of the Keynesian Welfare State. Both those inside the policy discourse and those whose professional identities are established through antagonism to the discourse benefit from the uncertainties and tragedies of reform.. (Ball, 1997, p258)

Given my own roles as a researcher and teacher, friend of colleagues, teachers and managers in FE (and married to an inspector working directly inside the policy process which I am researching) the final point in his summary of the main dilemma is even more compelling and salutary:

Critical researchers, apparently safely ensconced in the moral highground, nonetheless make a livelihood trading in the artefacts of misery and broken dreams of practitioners. None of us remains untainted by the incentives and disciplines of the new moral economy.. (ibid, p258)

Individual dilemmas are exposed and confronted in 'reflexive' research, particularly by ethnographic researchers. Whilst reflexivity avoids an over-rational account of policy-making and research by revealing the "*compromises, short-cuts, hunches and serendipitous occurrences*" (Walford cited by Troyna, 1994, p7), it can also be a tempting diversion from the "*formidable theoretical project*" of weaving policy and practice with macro and micro political dimensions into the coherent analytical model which Raab argues is often missing from educational policy research (1994, p25-26). In addition, Troyna argues that the tendency for reflexivity to be adopted mainly by qualitative sociologists leaves their accounts of policy-making and implementation open to accusations of vagueness, relativism and subjectivity (Troyna, 1994). Such openness could also portray, inadvertently, an account of amateurism.

Taking account of these dangers, I need to adopt a reflexive approach in order to justify my own ideological commitments and methodological eclecticism and to acknowledge difficulties with which I must deal in becoming a professional researcher but which also arise from my different roles, listed above. However, I also need to avoid the type of reflexivity which confers the *"status of 'heroic tales' in which the diligence, cleverness and artifice of the researcher is very much to the fore"* (Lee 1993, cited by Troyna, 1994, p5).

This Ph.D. will therefore aim to synthesise a range of political, social and institutional factors which affect how a particular policy is conceived, designed, implemented and amended. An initial aim was to avoid a naive version of the 'methodological eclecticism' which *"reigns supreme"* in policy research (Troyna, 1994, p 5). This study adopts a 'multiple perspectives approach' (Malen and Knapp, 1997) as part of 'illuminative evaluation' advocated by Parlett (1981). The study incorporates a range of methods and interim analyses of data, on-going reflection about epistemology and methodology and attempts to discuss emerging issues and findings with participants.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My overall aim is to contribute to 'policy scholarship' in two complementary areas: the links between intentions, design and implementation of an influential assessment policy in the post-compulsory sector and, secondly, the links between an assessment policy and teachers' and students' translation of its intentions into practice. In doing this, the study addresses four over-arching questions:

- how does the socio-economic and ideological context of policy for lifelong learning in the UK influence the types of motivation and autonomy seen as desirable for students in general vocational education?

- what does a policy-based case study of GNVQ assessment policy show about policy design, development and implementation in the post-compulsory curriculum?
- what does a practice-based case study of GNVQ assessment policy show about the impact of OBA systems on students' autonomy and motivation and on teachers' approaches to formative assessment?
- how can formative assessment in post-compulsory education be improved in order to enhance students' autonomy and motivation?

These questions are broken down in more detail as a basis for fieldwork activities and listed in Appendix 3. Analysis of research and empirical data from the fieldwork focuses on three related areas:

Policy formulation

In a broader context of structural conditions, the study evaluates how policy-makers²⁰ involved with GNVQ assessment policy thought that students' autonomy and motivation would be realised through an OBA model. It hopes to reveal the aims and commitments of those involved and the complex processes and compromises that underpinned development of the assessment models.

Policy implementation

In a meso level context of major restructuring in FE colleges, and pressures to widen participation and raise students' achievement of qualifications, the study analyses how teachers and students interpret policy intentions at the micro level of everyday assessment practices. It examines how they conceptualise the links between formative assessment, autonomy and motivation and then evaluates how the implementation of GNVQ assessment model has influenced teachers' and students' understanding of these links.

Policy effects

The study evaluates the implications of GNVQ assessment on students' attitudes and approaches to learning and suggests strategies that different constituencies (QCA, awarding bodies, inspectors, institutional managers, teachers and students) might adopt to improve formative assessment. It also suggests areas where further research might be needed.

In exploring these issues, the Ph.D aims to redress the balance in research on formative assessment which relates mainly to developments in the National Curriculum, and primary schools in particular. The same imbalance exists in policy based research. In addition, close political interest in teachers' pedagogy and assessment, much publicised in the media about schools, has been conspicuously absent in debate about pedagogy in the vocational curriculum. This contrast is reflected also in the general low status of research on policy, curriculum development and the effects of pedagogy and assessment in post-compulsory education (see Ranson, 1996; Bates et al, 1997; Ecclestone, 1997).

The socio-economic and ideological context for growing interest in lifelong learning is examined in Chapter Two while research evidence on autonomy, motivation and formative assessment is evaluated in Chapter Three. Implications of the research questions for epistemology are discussed in Chapter Four and for methodology in Chapter Five.

²⁰ I use the short-hand 'policy-makers' through the study to define the diverse individuals and representatives of interested constituencies who were involved in designing, implementing and evaluating the GNVQ assessment system between 1991 and 1999. These are listed in Appendix 8.

SUMMARY

Since 1979, I have come to recognise that complex links exist between social and political intentions for assessment, the theories of learning which are implicated in particular assessment systems and the effects of these systems on assessment practices. And despite being critical in the past of the prescriptiveness of NVQs and GNVQs, I recognise, that like CPVE, the genuine aims of their designers were to put assessment more in the control of learners than was the case in norm-referenced, opaque systems, and to make teachers more student-centred in their pedagogy and assessment practices. Thus, I do not see GNVQs as a 'straw man' to set up and then criticise. It seems that their development and implementation reflect deeper issues in assessment policy and practice, in ideas about what counts as 'achievement' and in political attempts to use assessment policy to influence both institutional change and pedagogy. Conflicting aims for GNVQs, summarised in Section Two of this chapter, and the structural conditions explored in Chapter Two, have therefore created contradictory rationales and approaches to assessment. Political tensions emerging from these conditions are likely to have unforeseen effects on underlying aims of autonomy and motivation, making it important for critics to differentiate carefully between effects of the GNVQ model itself and other factors. In particular, although GNVQs have been heavily criticised for having no conceptually coherent model of learning, it is woefully apparent that this is true of every other course on which I have taught! As Meagher (1997) points out, OBA is easy to criticise because it reveals its intentions, and desired learning processes while traditional qualifications, such as A-levels and university degree courses, do not.

Lastly, if my own experience is anything to go by (an admitted sample of one!), the path to informed enlightenment²¹ about assessment, the confidence to articulate it, and then to translate it into better formative assessment practices is a long process. However, one of my students told me that soon after beginning a Masters' module on assessment, she challenged an OFSTED inspector who criticised a colleague's use of formative assessment for his own incorrect theoretical understanding of its role in learning! The

²¹ When I wrote this in 1997, I did not then realise the implicit modernist epistemology of this notion!

importance of effective initial training and continuing professional development to help teachers understand the political, social and pedagogic importance of assessment, and to be committed to improving its role in learning, is therefore very apparent.

CHAPTER 2

EMPOWERMENT, CARE OR CONTROL? : THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Powerful rhetorics of empowerment, motivation and greater access to accreditation accompany political intervention in the scope and format of assessment systems from the National Curriculum (5-16) to the post-14 vocational curriculum, work-based training and parts of adult and community education and higher education. Assessment systems based increasingly on pre-defined learning outcomes and criteria and tighter funding constraints, perhaps linked eventually to a national credit framework, are lynchpins of policy for lifelong learning¹. More broadly, assessment debates focus on similar concerns across the European Union, and also in New Zealand, Australia and the United States. However, behind an apparent consensus that assessment reforms will encourage vocationally-relevant learning, and thereby help individuals and society meet the demands of globalisation, tensions remain about education's broader purposes for modernising the workforce, creating critical citizens, enhancing social progress and advancing equal opportunities.

Trends in the 'politics of education' manifest themselves in 'education policies' (Dale, 1994). They reflect deeper changes in the respective roles of the State, individuals, public and private institutions as advanced capitalist and developing societies confront capitalist globalisation (see Ainley, 1999 and Tooley, 1999 for contrasting critiques). Meanwhile, profound doubts about the impact of knowledge creation, globalisation and technological progress foster discourses of 'crisis', 'social polarisation' and 'social transformation' in education policy throughout Europe. Growing concern about 'a risk society' where new definitions and regulation of 'risk' require new social and political

¹ As I revise this chapter for the last time (August 2000), work by the FEU in the early 1990s on a credit framework is now being moved forward by the Further Education Funding Council and the QCA, beginning with a more unitised curriculum in September 2000 for A-levels and GNVQs.

responses reflects a profound loss of confidence in Enlightenment ideas of rational 'truth', scientific and social progress and technological innovation (Beck, 1992). In this context, education policy discussed in this chapter, and wider philosophical debates discussed in Chapter Four, reveal increasing scepticism about both the possibility and desirability of modernist ideals that education is a key to scientifically progressive and humane knowledge for the 'good of all'.

Concerns about global competitiveness provide rhetorical legitimacy for political intervention in education structures, curriculum content and assessment regimes in attempts to secure pedagogic and institutional change but also broader adherence to new national, transnational and economic structures². Following Habermas' analysis of a 'crisis of motivation' in advanced capitalist societies, Andy Hargreaves argues that assessment systems are a crucial mechanism for securing social consent amongst young people who are no longer guaranteed jobs in return for compliance in education. From this perspective, political interest in assessment that motivates people to achieve in formal education, *and* legitimises the rationing of jobs and education, arises from the need to provide an alternative to 'obedience for qualifications leading to jobs' (ibid, p111).

In policy for lifelong learning, such tensions create a consensus where horizons for social change are lowered to a connection between state education as vocationally relevant lifelong learning and hopes for economic prosperity. This view is epistomised in the Labour government's view that "*education is the best economic policy we have*" (Tony Blair in DfEE, 1998), and that "*education is social justice*" (Blair cited by Ainley, 1999, p 23).

In order to provide a context for claims that certain forms of assessment can enhance learners' motivation and autonomy, this chapter explores the links between assessment policy, structural conditions and meso level change in FE colleges.

Section One examines the growing emphasis on vocationalism in policy for lifelong learning.

Section Two explores a changing ideological context for the goals and practices of OBA assessment systems.

Section Three examines meso-level changes in FE that affect the implementation of initiatives such as GNVQs.

The implications of contextual factors for the possibility of using better formative assessment to develop learners' autonomy and motivation are examined in Chapter Three.

1. VOCATIONALISM AND LIFELONG LEARNING

a. New Labour, same old consensus?

Across Europe, debates about lifelong learning are embroiled in fears about competitiveness, innovations in technology and capitalist globalisation. Preceding the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996, the Delors White Paper, 'Growth, Competitiveness and Employment' proposed that ... *human resource development - and hence, education, training and participation - is the key in maintaining European competitiveness, which in turn, is essential to economic and social well-being across the Community...* (Chisholm, 1997, p43). European concerns parallel the pessimistic invocations of looming disaster, lack of options, and a common stake in bending before the economic whirlwind, routinely cited in British policy papers from the 1970s. For example: ...*If we lack skills, we lose out. The economy, the performance of every business and the prosperity of every citizen suffer. We have no choice. We must all*

²See Field's analysis of the 1995 European White Paper on Lifelong Learning (1997a) and Field 1997b, Brine 1995, Sultana 1995 for discussion of education policy as legitimization of European identity.

invest in learning for the future... (Stuart, 1997, p67). Education is widely seen as a key to social and economic well-being:

...many people's futures are at risk because of low levels of basic skills, inability to handle the new communication and information technologies, and poor management of many small firms. And while far too many people lack opportunity or motivation to escape from the low skills, low earnings trap, at the other end of the labour market we are engaged in an ever-faster race to keep up with technological change and change in global markets for which many of our educational systems are poorly equipped (McNair, 1998, p3).

Yet, a significant change is evident in political and professional discourses arising from, and contributing to, consensus about the purposes of lifelong learning. Far from the hard-edged, arid economic instrumentalism of Conservative policy in the UK between 1979 and 1997 which proselytised 'survival of the fittest, discourses are now suffused with themes of access, democracy, anti-elitism, social cohesion and inclusiveness. These shift social policy goals from 'equal opportunities' to 'inclusion' within existing social formations, a trend in Europe noted by Brine (1995) and Sultana (1995). And, notwithstanding espoused commitments to diverse purposes for lifelong learning, policy concentrates on economic competitiveness.

Such moves reflect a wider shift from left and right wing politics to what Avis calls a 'modernising settlement' (1998a) amongst many academics, policy-makers, employers' organisations and teachers. This elides liberal, modernizing and social justice perspectives in education and promotes changes to institutional structures, qualifications and funding in order to erode divisions in a mass post-compulsory system (see, for example, Hodgson and Spours, 1997). At the same time, there is a growing consensus that young people and adults who do not participate in 'purposeful' learning are 'at risk' of marginalisation, disenfranchisement and exclusion³. There is a growing convergence between education initiatives and welfare and youth service initiatives designed to

³ Bodies like NIACE define 'purposeful' learning as a wide range of community-based, informal and formal activities that provide a springboard into formal, accredited learning or into training at work which might or might not be accredited.

combat these dangers (Colley, 2000; Bullen et al, 2000). Yet, for Patrick Ainley, in New Labour's vision of the learning society, such initiatives mask social inequality and move policy from 'training without jobs' to 'learning without jobs': "*Like actors 'resting', no-one would ever be unemployed, but only 'learning'* (1999, p176).

One effect of consensus is that debate about lifelong learning is rife with false dichotomies and stereotypes about 'academic' or 'vocational' learning, 'elitist selection' or 'mass access', 'relevant' or 'irrelevant', 'practical skills' or 'theoretical knowledge' and so on. Vocational relevance and 'student-centred' learning and assessment are contrasted powerfully with the inward, exclusive nature of traditional education (see, for example, Robertson, 1995) and the didactic transmission of "*unwanted answers to unasked questions*" (Popper cited by Coffield and Williamson, 1997). It is therefore common to hear assertions, often from people who have experienced long immersions in a subject or professional domain to develop their own expertise and ability to transfer it to new situations, that we 'no longer need knowledge'. Instead, 'learning to learn' is merely the ability to know where to 'find knowledge', and how to manage and jettison it when it becomes out of date. Criticism of this view is likely to be dismissed as 'elitist'.

Debate is also constrained by the routine involvement of employers' organisations, particularly large employers, at all levels of curriculum design and implementation⁴. Despite the fact that 75% of firms in Britain remain far from being 'learning organisations' (Coffield, 2000b), this influence is characterised by a combination of deference to employers and impatience with their poor record of investment in education and training.⁵ Indeed, there is a powerful but little-heard argument which proposes that lack of investment in education and training, and competition based on low prices, monopolies and low wages, are rational strategies by some elements of capital in a competitive, rapidly stratifying global economy (Keep and Mayhew, 1998). This suggests that some employers do not want, or need, highly skilled workers.

⁴ Employers play a major role in the LSC and its planning processes while executive appointments to the new Adult Learning Inspectorate confirm an employer-based, training ethos.

Nevertheless, qualifications heavily skewed to work-related skills and attitudes reinforce images of highly skilled, adaptable, problem-solving team workers moving autonomously between jobs and using evidence of educational achievement to gain them. Support for this image reinterprets broader notions of personal and social development as transferable 'skills', generating long lists of assessable generic competences deemed essential for employment. Yet, the modernising settlement noted above overlooks this reinterpretation of general education and personal development and also the way in which many employers' recruitment practices rely on traditional qualifications in the 'best' education institutions (Coffield, 1997a).

In response, supporters of technical reforms to qualification systems hope to erode academic and vocational divisions and to secure the interests of diverse groups (see Hodgson and Spours, 1997; Young, 1998; Raffe and Young, 1998). However, as Avis points out, the idea that policy can somehow be 'ideology-free' ignores social conflict and differentiation, *"as if these can be wished away or at least ameliorated through successful economic and educational strategies"* (1998, p260). More broadly, political emphasis on 'education as social justice' and 'parity of esteem' between qualification systems signals a lowering of expectations that equality of opportunity is a viable rationale for better assessment.⁶

There is therefore a climate where once-contested goals for cultural vibrancy, equal opportunities, citizenship, social cohesion, the benefits of scientific progress and creating modern workforces have mutated into a new form of liberal vocationalism. Despite criticism of profound inequality in a deep, but largely undiscussed, capitalist crisis (see Hill et al, 1999; Ainley, 1999), many supporters of a social reconstructionist view of education, or of the now-discredited attempts of the 1970s to add general studies to

⁵For example, the State bankrolls training even for profitable employers (for example, Sainsbury's NVQ training is franchised from colleges) to a very high level, both here and in Europe through the European Social Fund.

⁶This has parallels in the peace process in Northern Ireland where republican calls for equal opportunities in a united Ireland are now calls for parity of esteem in new political bodies.

vocational programmes, seem reconciled to vocationally- relevant OBA. As Hickox and Moore explain:

...Vocationalism's anti-academic, anti-elitist rhetoric recalls progressivism's earlier criticisms of traditionalism. It derives much of its recent success from the ability to appeal to a range of distinct political constituencies and to a diverse range of arguments tough-minded, 'right wing' arguments concerning economic modernisation and, also, appeals to social justice, consumer choice and expanded opportunities...(Hickox and Moore, 1995, p283)

b. Dissenting from vocationalism

Despite the apparent hegemony of a vocationalist emphasis in current policy, there is strong dissent from political visions of lifelong learning (for example, Coffield, 1997a; 1999a; 2000b; Trow, 1998). In addition, there is concern that, despite technical reforms to qualification systems, 'finely tuned differentiation' and growing segregation characterise educational and post-educational destinations (Hargreaves, 1989; Coffield and Williamson, 1997; Ainley, 1999). There is also criticism of the political emphasis on lifelong learning as an investment in 'human capital', namely the skills, motivation and achievement of people that individuals and society invest in to improve economic prosperity. Schuller and Field (1998) point out that this notion is influential at many levels, including political imagery. It emphasises the importance of human beings as another capital investment:

Just as physical capital is created by changes in materials to form tools that facilitate production, human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways" (Coleman cited by Schuller and Field, 1998, p227).

However, human capital also enables problems of unemployment, job insecurity and continuous training to be "*privatised and handed over to individuals to solve*" (Coffield, 1999a, p65) and "*serves as an intellectual and moral escape mechanism from unpleasant social and political difficulties*" (Balogh and Steeten quoted by Schuller, 1997, p117).

This enables politicians to assert that fragmentation in social structures has been produced by (uncontrollable) global forces on the one hand, and the (manageable) failings of a lower skilled workforce on the other (Macrae et al, 1997). These perspectives produce a stream of rhetoric that successful economies arise from successful education systems, an argument seemingly untainted by capitalist crises in Japan and Germany, not to mention Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

In this scenario, modular curriculum structures and OBA support the equation of learning with pursuit of vocationally-relevant qualifications by self-interested individuals in a competitive labour market. Learning becomes "*...commodified as a private good and a national resource...* (Macrae et al, 1997, p500), promoted as a lifelong accumulation of purposeful and assessable achievements, increasingly specified and accredited by government agencies and perhaps recorded in 'lifelong learning portfolios' (Schulslik, 1998).

Yet, despite injunctions that education must prepare people for a post-Fordist world, unemployment, low status training, low wages and part-time, temporary work (what Ainley calls 'McJobs', 1999), are alternatives to FE or university for many post-16 learners. As Macrae et al (1998) and Ball et al (1999) point out, the 'lived realities' of local job markets have a profound effect on young people's motivation for the education and training opportunities on offer. In this context, the 'learning society' becomes "*a new basis on which social divisions are re-established and re-legitimated..*" (Macrae et al, 1997, p507). In addition, some researchers argue that the realities of the job market are far from the idealised opportunities portrayed by a post-Fordist, high skills rhetoric. James Avis, for example, argues that this rhetoric overestimates the extent of post-Fordist practices and overlooks how post-Fordist settings, such as Nissan in the UK, can be oppressive for workers (Avis, 1996). At the same time, many companies expect their highly skilled workers to be loyal and flexible but, abandon their skilled workers as soon as the economic going gets tough (Coffield, 1999b)⁷.

⁷ The debacle in June 2000 over BMW and The Rover Group is the latest example in the UK.

In a climate of uncertainty about globalisation, and corresponding concerns about the risk of marginalisation and growing inequality, emphasis on human capital obscures socio-economic reality and structural barriers to monetary and cultural capital. One effect is that discourses of access and participation quickly become blame for non-participation in formal learning and failure to succeed in employment (Coffield, 1999b; Edwards, 1997). In addition, many adults experience such pressure to update and retrain that lifelong learning becomes virtually compulsory (Tight, 1998a), a trend also evident in parts of Europe (Coffield, 1999a).

Human capital also encourages self-interest and instrumental motivation based on credentialism. According to Ralph Fevre et al, this consolidates cultural dispositions in the UK to narrow expectations of occupational relevance and reward in education and training:

...The people who reject education and training and the people who accept its value in the production of credentials - and feel they are owed the chance to earn those credentials - all feel they must be compensated for putting up with education and training if they have to undergo it... (Fevre et al, 1999, p 19)

Alison Wolf's analysis of credential inflation, where people chase the best qualifications for progression and status, bears out the prevalence of this motive (Wolf, 1997b, see also Hickox and Moore, 1995). Although incentives such as credit-based, modular assessment and individual learning accounts make accreditation more accessible, merely making people willing to pay as purchasers of (or speculators in) qualifications, while their underlying attitude is unchanged, does not make them "*buyers of the substance of education and training*" (Fevre et al, 1999). Instead, tightly-prescribed, over-loaded curricula encourage an ethos of 'getting students through' (Eraut, 1997) or lead teachers to manipulate the criteria (Field, 1991).

Following arguments about human capital and credentialism, teachers' own careers could make them adopt instrumental, individualistic views of their own professional

development, as well as of students' learning. David Hartley (1991), for example, argues that teachers and students internalise a "*bureaucratic cognitive style..*" from bureaucratic processes of learning and assessment, leading teachers to adopt an "*uncritical adaptive mentality (which) makes a virtue of obediently yielding to prescriptions*" (Hlebowitsch, 1990).

As a counter to instrumentalism and compliance, social capital theory shows that much learning is both inspired from communal and social interests and, in turn, raises commitments to "*the features of social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives*" (Putnam cited by Schuller and Field, 1998, pp228). Promotion of social capital requires better understanding of these links and the factors in specific communities (including organisations) that enhance voluntary, mutual acceptance of obligations (see, for example, Kilpatrick et al, 1999). The social motivation that underpins social capital is based, according to Fevre et al (1999), on a desire to gain skills and knowledge, not from self-interest but from social commitment. Acknowledging that it is a 'romantic' image, they argue that Welsh miners and trade union activists in the early days of workers' self-education illustrate social motives for learning as a desire for 'universal transformation'. Group loyalties, such as commitment to a public service, allegiance to a craft, or subject discipline, a sense of professionalism, loyalty to family, community or colleagues, produce another social motive, namely 'vocational transformation', where a desire to do a job better is not synonymous with trying to get a better job. Attitudinal change would therefore be signified by people no longer thinking that they should be compensated for enduring education.

Theories of human capital and social capital have important implications for ideas about motivation and autonomy, explored in Chapter Three. However, the ideological context of New Labour's goal that education must foster social cohesion suggests that liberal interest in social capital and motivation could take on a more authoritarian tone. This possibility, and its implications for this study, are discussed next.

2. A CHANGING IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

a. Towards a culture of low expectations

Notwithstanding positive dimensions to ideas about social capital and social motivation, policy for lifelong learning could become influenced increasingly by a view that those who do not participate in formal education or purposeful learning are 'at risk'. This trend has parallels in other countries: for example, Kelly (1999) argues that in Australia, vocational education policy is infected by moral panics about young people. This results in new characterisations of 'risk' and mechanisms for regulating risk being applied to a growing range of groups and behaviours. In the UK, a discourse of 'being at risk' characterises some liberal and Leftist concerns about young people and adults who remain outside purposeful learning (see Colley, 2000; Bullen, et al, 2000). As noted above, these concerns emphasise empathy rather than the 'survival of the fittest' ethos of neo-liberal perspectives in social policy.

Such concerns lead some educators and policy-makers to advocate stronger encouragement for non-participants to take up learning opportunities, partly because not learning, for example at work, puts oneself at risk, but also one's colleagues (see Tuckett, 1998). For those who believe that education is a force for social justice, the problem of giving people "*permission to have agency*" (Tuckett, 1999, informal communication) is acute when hope for the future is bleak without skills and where useful learning continues to benefit those who have already had it. Following this argument, if education really *does* empower people, stronger direction might overcome a prevailing belief amongst many adults that education is 'not for the likes of us'. Marginalised adults or young people 'at risk' of exclusion may, therefore, need propelling into its liberating possibilities. At the same time, if consensus sees education as the route to social and economic well-being for individuals and society as a whole, non-participants undermine a wider interest.

A benign concern that we may 'need to be cruel to be kind' fits well with New Labour's much-vaunted moral purpose in all aspects of policy from the Kosovo war in 1999 to welfare reform. It also reflects wider debate about compulsion and social obligation in welfare policy, evident in initiatives such as the New Deal initiative for unemployed people. Yet, although such responses may, as Alan Tuckett argues, signify a need to 'think differently' about boundaries between choice and compulsion (see Ecclestone and Tuckett, 2000), they have authoritarian and moralistic tones. For example, financial incentives to take up learning opportunities may precede stronger encouragement to make provision through savings and to plan a long life of learning strategically rather than 'frittering it' on short-term courses without progression (see FEFC, 1998a).

For some critics, trends towards compulsion in welfare and social policy indicates that New Labour is merely continuing neo-liberal Conservative policy (for example, 'Marxism Today', 1998; Hill et al, 1999; Ainley, 1999). However, a new dimension to these trends is added by seeing them as generated by growing 'risk consciousness' and by attempts in politics, scientific research, and increasingly, in social science, to '*make the incalculable calculable*' (Beck quoted by Kelly, 1999, p196). The 'sociology of risk' is widely attributed to the work of Ulrich Beck (for example, Beck, 1992; 1999) and also to recent work by Anthony Giddens. Beck argues that proliferating definitions of 'risk', new ways to regulate risk and the individualisation of people's responses, are logical outcomes of technological and scientific advance. Risk consciousness reflects a 'crisis of modernity' where society must become reflexive about the impact of advances in knowledge and science and about necessary risks created by them. Fear of risk opens up new social and political dilemmas about who should define and regulate it and creates public scepticism about the roles of hitherto powerful agencies and bodies. Like Giddens, he sees new opportunities for democratic involvement in debating, defining and regulating risk and for new forms of trust to be fostered between people in order to overcome social 'difference' (Avis, 1995b).

This view is echoed by Alan Tuckett in his optimism that having to rethink boundaries between compulsion and choice in education is not something imposed by 'the State' but

something 'we can all do' (Ecclestone and Tuckett, 2000). From the perspective of risk consciousness, moves towards compulsion in lifelong learning reflect new definitions of risk caused by non-participation in education, and the need for new responses. However, as I argue below, they may signal a broader tendency towards a new type of moral authoritarianism, arising from a pessimistic, conservative view of human agency.

Sociologist Frank Furedi evaluates the implications of risk consciousness for social and political perceptions of human agency (1997; 1999a, b). In doing so, he addresses directly research by Beck and Giddens, drawing on cultural studies, economics and the proliferation of 'risk' literature in medical and social policy research. He then relates this research to political and media campaigns in the UK and America over the last ten years around disasters, health panics and preoccupation with personal and emotional problems. I summarise his main thesis and then evaluate its implications for OBA and quality assurance systems as a context for conditions in FE colleges, discussed in Section Three.

Liberal concerns to protect people from globalisation are, for Furedi, informed by 'risk consciousness' that both creates and arises from a cautious, anxious outlook on the future. While Beck focuses primarily on risk associated with scientific and technological problems, Furedi connects risk consciousness to State intervention in everyday life and to pessimistic views about human agency and scientific progress. He highlights themes of fear, risk aversion and increased State regulation in apparently disparate examples: a myriad of health panics; campaigns for 'safe' sex and healthy living; obsession with emotional and personal life in media reporting (such as correct parenting and children's safety, sexual abuse, family violence, work-place harassment and bullying); fear of environmental hazards and scientific initiatives such as genetically-modified food; and a morbid, often voyeuristic obsession with the fate of victims and survivors from disasters and the minutiae of people's emotional responses to such events rather than analysis of what causes these phenomena⁸.

⁸This soft approach to news dominated coverage of the Kosovo war, particularly in its treatment of refugees, and has been criticised by John Pilger (1998). It reflects a move from the journalism of detachment to calls by journalists like Martin Bell and Fergal Keane for more 'morally sound' (i.e. attached) news coverage.

The growing fragmentation of social communities and allegiances, and feelings that individual circumstances are created by conditions outside social and individuals' control, are, for Beck (1992), features of a 'risk society'. However, Furedi argues that a new dimension in media and political coverage of events is individuals' lack of control over a growing range of events and life experiences. This coverage frequently eulogises people as 'victims', appearing to give them a moral claim, not because of what they have done but because of what has been done to them. Yet, media and political presentation of damaged people as scarred irrevocably by events, and unable to work out their own responses to problems, often has an underlying judgmental tone.

One effect is to encourage dependence on 'experts' such as counsellors, psychologists, advice workers and the social services. This dependence goes beyond support for deep-seated social or personal problems to 'help' for experiences and events once dealt with by family, friends and local communities. This gives State agencies a more interventionist role in private life, not as 'nanny' but, more subtly, as 'therapist'. While Beck (1992) charts the growing mistrust of politicians, scientists, companies and other agencies, and sees progressive possibilities in this for democratic involvement, Furedi argues that dependency on professionals fosters individuation and unhealthy mistrust amongst strangers, peers, neighbours, local communities, and the family itself.

At the same time, political and media attempts to create public solidarity around tragedies, such as the Dunblane shooting, sexual abuse, the murders of children, encourage mistrust, alongside the idea that such events have a broader 'moral significance'. The moralising that accompanies a growing range of events is perhaps illustrated by examples such as the crusading tone of the 'moral war' in Kosovo in 1999 and media denunciations in 'the public interest' of famous individuals in the UK who transgress codes of individual conduct⁹. Examples in the footnote show the moral

⁹ Random examples would be the resignation of Glen Hoddle, ex-manager of the English football team, for negative comments about people with disabilities, and resignations following the deliberate entrapment and subsequent exposure by 'News of the World' reporters of an English rugby player and a BBC radio presenter to reveal their alleged cocaine habit.

arbitrariness, power and prurience of media exposure, paving the way for campaigns such as the 'outing' of paedophiles by the 'News of the World' in August 2000.

For Furedi, moralisation accompanies risk consciousness, encompassing actions of those in authority and a growing range of individual behaviours characterised as 'putting others at risk'. Combined with dependency on experts and the fragmentation of communities, these trends create a tendency to question the scope available for human action and initiative. At the heart of risk consciousness is *"the diminished subject"* where:

increasingly we feel comfortable with seeing people as victims of their own circumstances rather than as authors of their own lives. The outcome of these developments is a world which equates the good life with self-limitation and risk aversion (p147)¹⁰

The premise of a diminished subject is a misanthropic view of the world and of humanity's ability to solve problems. In a risk society, this legitimises State intervention in personal life and behaviour by initially encouraging, then regulating, self-limitation and risk aversion through guidelines, advice, legislation and, increasingly, advice about media coverage. Intervention comes from government and a growing number of organisations. Examples are: guidelines to parents from the Home Office about protecting children from paedophiles; from the DfEE about parent/school contracts; from the Home Office to voluntary parenting groups run by social services; from the Department of Health about how to be a good father.¹¹ Guidelines for risk aversion also come from self-help groups or organisations that once campaigned for rights or equal opportunities. For example, the National Union of Students issues leaflets about the dangers of sex, drinking, drugs and potential violence from residents of university towns, unions prioritise codes of conduct about harassment at work and the Asthma Society seeks legislation to ban smoking in the home. In these examples, 'risk' encompasses the

¹⁰ I was reminded of this argument during a conference after-dinner speech in 1999 by a college principal. She argued that we had to help learners find 'the hero inside themselves' (the title of a popular record by 'M People'). But 'heroism' required teachers and learners alike to admit vulnerability, uncertainty and humility in the face of risks rather than show bravery or take creative risks!

obvious dangers of paedophiles (although perhaps 'stranger danger' is overplayed), walking alone to halls of residence, not doing your homework, fathers' absence from the birth of their children (or not taking paternity leave), being alone with a colleague and smoking at home.

Of course, guidelines are not moralistic *per se* and are often common-sense attempts to alert people to risks or to clarify protocols and expectations. Yet Furedi argues that guidelines respond increasingly to mistrust and then reinforce it by anticipating and formalising expectations of transgression¹². Guidelines can therefore transmogrify into rules and calls for legislation, removing autonomy by codifying commonplace behaviour whilst appearing to solve problems. Importantly, in this climate, 'risk' is redefined to encompass more transgressional behaviours, including 'autonomy' itself. Those who transgress the guidelines threaten the community and become a source of mistrust.

Furedi compares his own thesis about the decline of 'subjectivity' (ie. the potential for human action) to accounts by Beck and Giddens which attribute risk consciousness to the 'manufactured uncertainty' created by human intervention into social life, science and nature. From this perspective, advances in knowledge and technology themselves become risky. Yet, Furedi sees this view as inherently conservative, citing Beck's observation that society increasingly unites to avert risks associated with the future instead of striving for unity based on progress (Beck, 1992). At the same time, low expectations of social and scientific progress and the decline of traditional moral values create uncertainty about personal and social issues. This enables the politicisation of moral values and a rising tide of censure and prurience in the UK and US.

Such uncertainty means that calls for a return to conservative values (for example, Tate, 1998) have little resonance. Instead, Furedi sees the politicisation of individual morality as the most insidious threat to beliefs in human agency, progress and creative risk. Low

¹¹ The Department of Health 'summit' in July 2000 on young women's body image could well be followed by guidelines to magazine editors and writers of soap operas, just as concerns about adult illiteracy led the DfEE to encourage story lines in 'Brookside'.

expectations of human behaviour, and belief in the power of fate over people's lives, undermine both personal autonomy and social responsibility whilst leading us to accept closer State regulation of both our public and private behaviour: everyday life itself becomes 'risky'.

The vacuum created by the decline of traditional morality and the emergence of values associated with risk consciousness is filled by a "*new etiquette for regulating the interactions between people*" (p150). This offers a caring, seemingly non-judgmental morality which seeks to empower and protect the powerless. Indeed, in its attempts to 'protect us from ourselves', it explicitly rejects old-style conservative morality as irrelevant whilst lecturing those who take risks. Importantly, its inclusive language reaches out to the marginalised and critics alike, appearing to confront social divisions whilst not attaching itself directly to a system of values¹³. Genuine concerns about social divisions mean that a new discourse of caring inclusivity is far from a cynical appropriation of liberal values to disguise more sinister motives or to reconcile us to a gloomy future. Instead, any drift towards moral authoritarianism is *disguised* or masked by liberal intentions but not deliberately. It is clearly much more subtle than this: as Ball points out, shifts of ideology and moral economy are never clear-cut, uncontested, or realised in standard ways (Ball, 1997).

Of course, the growth of State regulation over the past twenty years is hardly a new observation. Nor is Furedi the first to note a growing celebration of 'victim' culture. However, such observations are normally associated with the libertarian Right (for example, Anderson and Mullen, 1998). Instead, from a perspective of dialectical materialism, Furedi sees different roots for the phenomena he evaluates from other critics of New Labour's new moral authoritarianism. Indeed, he notes that these criticisms often object to the presentation of State interventions but not to their underlying rationale (see, for example, Tight, 1998a). For him, moral authoritarianism is not merely New Labour's new version of conservatism as some left-wing critics have alleged, or the individual

¹² For example, the detailed exemplification of the criteria for the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise attempts to counter imaginative interpretations of criteria during the 1996 RAE (L.Elliott, 2000).

¹³ This is a feature of communitarianism (see Arthur, 1998).

Christian morality of Prime Minister Blair or individual ministers (see 'Marxism Today, 1998.). Instead, it is a logical outcome of social atomisation created over the past twenty years and endorsement from the liberal Left of a 'culture of fear' and the politicised morality outlined above. From this perspective, moralising about risk is not tied to neo-Liberalism or Conservatism but deeply implicated in New Labour's 'new etiquette'.

In the light of this argument, concern about 'risk' for those excluded or marginalised from lifelong learning is tainted with an acceptance that there are no other solutions to social and economic problems. Despite lack of convincing evidence about links between education, social cohesion and economic prosperity, the new etiquette avoids overt judgements about the causes of social problems. It offers, instead, a relativist, apparently liberal morality which helps people make sense of their individuation whilst suggesting that there are few radical answers, except to increase individuals' accountability for problems and make them pay more for apparent solutions (see Coffield, 1998; Tight, 1998). This justifies what Giddens calls "*a fundamental impetus towards the re-moralising of everyday life*" where morality demands commitment to a lifestyle rather than to a community (Giddens cited by Furedi, p163). The new etiquette adds another dimension to blaming individuals for social problems by demanding that people subject themselves to core values of safety, cautious and self-limiting behaviour. Once 'risk' encompasses any transgressional or controversial action, it cannot be seen as creative: for example, one consequence of a view that not learning at work risks colleagues' jobs is to extend moral judgements about what constitutes risky behaviour, thereby encouraging mistrust. Such judgements are especially suspect when all the skills that individuals can accumulate will not stop high-tech employers leaving the UK (Coffield, 1999b).

A final implication of arguments in this section is that promotion of social capital as a counter to human capital could become tainted by the new etiquette discussed above, rather than by positive promotion of trust and social commitments. In response to individuation, for example, some critics link the erosion of certain communities to the 'cult of the individual', exacerbated by human capital. In contrast, Furedi argues that this overlooks declining faith in human agency, especially amongst parts of the liberal Left.

Communities where people are atomised and mistrust others are unlikely to have an elevated sense of individual aspiration, thereby diminishing rather than enhancing autonomy and eroding social aspirations. Individuation therefore implies a turning in on oneself and is not synonymous with individualism. As a result, the communal motivation and trust necessary to participate in purposeful learning cannot be fostered readily without some individual aspiration. In fragmented communities, however, it may be tempting to manufacture communal feelings by inducing guilty obligation to others and to moralise about non-conforming forms of social capital. As Tom Schuller points out, ‘communitarian stances’ on social capital raise problems about the “*complexity of norms*” and how tightly they are enforced (Schuller, 1997, p121).

3. COLLEGES IN THE 1990s

a. Micro-disciplinary practices

If the ideological context discussed above has any resonance, it affects rationales for policy change and the ‘cognitive restructuring’ necessary for connecting policies with the social and organisational realities of college managers, teachers and students. It also affects the outlook of ‘epistemic communities’ (Hulme, 1998), advocacy groups and other designated experts who populate the diverse processes of policy design, implementation and evaluation. Arguments in Section Two suggest that teachers in FE are subject to new forms of external regulation arising from a climate of risk aversion, mistrust and low expectations as well as from trends in neo-liberal managerialism (see Avis et al (1996); Gleeson and Shain, 1999a; 1999b)¹⁴

It is therefore important to explore how trends discussed so far might affect FE teachers’ responses to assessment policy and quality assurance systems that are based increasingly on what Habermas calls ‘technical rationality’ (see, for example, Hodgkinson, 1998) and on

¹⁴ There is not space here to chart the complex history and recent legislative change for the FE sector. Some effects of change on working practices will be portrayed in chapters based on fieldwork data in colleges (Seven and Eight). The detail of legislation and organisational restructuring in colleges is evaluated by Gleeson, 1996; Gleeson and Shain, 1999a, 1999b; Ainley and Bailey, 1997.

'performativity' (Broadfoot, 2000; Torrance, 2000). At the same time, Ball proposes that 'the new moral economy of the public sector' (1997, p265) has transformed our professional (and personal) subjectivities and values. For him, these changes are drawn from the market economy and rooted in a "*social psychology of self-interest*" (1997, p259). For example, self-interest is created by competition between colleges over inspection grades, funding linked to students' achievement and individualised learning programmes.

The effects of assessment policy in colleges therefore have to be related to structural conditions but also to a meso level context where scrutiny of colleges, particularly in relation to quality assurance, is now intensified by their new central role in policy proposals for lifelong learning (DfEE, 1999). Many colleges are preparing for this new, elevated role after the upheavals of incorporation in 1993. These led to financial crises for 50% of the 450 colleges funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), acrimonious disputes over contracts and conditions, repeated restructuring in colleges and growing political concerns about mismanagement. 150,000 full-time staff have left colleges since 1993 through retirement, voluntary and compulsory redundancy, replaced by growing numbers of part-time and temporary staff and an intensification of full-time teaching contracts. As a result, colleges now have one of the most casualised workforces in Britain with over 50% employed on some form of casual contract (Shain, 1998), a rise in casual contracts of 28% between 1996 and 1998 (FEFC, 2000a).¹⁵

At the same time, FE colleges have expanded their student base in response to policy for wider participation yet must meet tighter targets for student retention and achievement of formal qualifications.¹⁶ Political concerns about teaching quality, and disputes about inspection and quality assurance, began to affect FE in May 1999 with moves from government to 'name and shame' failing colleges. FE is now rife with clashing discourses

¹⁵ This is followed closely by universities: in my own, 41% of academic staff are on temporary contracts.

¹⁶ As Adrian Perry, principal of Lambeth college argues, obsession with targets infects all areas of public policy, with 'ludicrous' effects on colleges, including high expenditure on creative accounting and divisive attributions of blame when targets are not met (Perry, 1999).

of 'sleaze', 'mismanagement', 'inclusiveness', 'widening participation' and 'community responsiveness'.

Changes in the FE sector are also characterised by 'managerialism'; the incorporation of market-related mechanisms such as output-related funding, competition between institutions, measures of efficiency and the redrawing of professional identities as managerial ones (Gleeson and Shain, 1999a, 1999b). Importantly for the context of this Ph.D, professional autonomy in designing, managing, teaching and assessing curricula is redefined as 'liability', 'delivery' and 'devolution' of regulated systems. Assessment systems, inspections and quality assurance systems in FE therefore exemplify political attempts to secure change in the post-compulsory sector of education through a range of "*micro-disciplinary practices*" (Ball, 1997, p260). Phil Hodgkinson argues that post-Fordist notions of total quality management as techniques of self-surveillance and mutual surveillance between peers inform such practices, arising from an intensification of technical rationality (Hodgkinson, 1998a). Such features characterise the GNVQ assessment system which, according to Bates (1998a; 1998b), draws from current approaches to human resource management (HRM) with its emphasis on 'empowerment' and the need to:

give more responsibility to employers to determine how tasks can best be done and reducing the extent to which they are closely supervised through hierarchical and bureaucratically structured tiers of management..." (1998a, p11).

A powerful effect of increased harmony between curriculum structures, quality assurance and assessment systems is a coalescing of technical mechanisms that adopt the characteristics of audit and inspection, combined with ideas from HRM. Yet, the excessive rituals of verification and audit in all areas of government lead Power (1997) to argue that the "*pathologicality of excessive checking*" reflects the cessation of trust, but with little idea of what must be checked and what can be taken on trust against economic criteria. This substitutes democratic political accountability with managerialist

accountability, creates new definitions of risk and reliance on guidelines, and erodes expectations of trust within organisations, and between institutions and external agencies.

At both the meso level of organisational structures, and at the micro level of day-to-day staff rooms and classrooms, interactions seem, therefore, to rely increasingly on codes of conduct, guidelines, assessment and quality specifications. At one level, these make clear what is required of the diverse groups and individuals who use them: OBA systems in particular codify attributes and learning activities hitherto at the discretion of teachers and awarding bodies to disclose. Yet they belie a deeper tension where the well-known phenomenon of 'spiralling specifications' (see Wolf, 1995) combines with political pressures to secure common, standardised interpretations. Thus, 'guidelines' soon become 'exemplars of good practice' and then rules, whilst criteria become checklists for self and external regulation. In announcing an inspection handbook, the chief inspector for the Further Education Funding Council pointed out that *"we have tried hard to get the balance right between producing rules and offering guidelines"* (FEFC, 1998).

In assessment, specifications protect teachers against challenge or appeal from learners (see, for example, Ecclestone and Swann, 1998). In the case of college inspections, guidelines protect inspectors from principals appealing against grading decisions, or are used by college managers to blame staff for poor inspection grades! In the light of arguments about risk aversion and mistrust discussed above, a cumulative but unintended effect is to reinforce calls for regulation, fuelling a reluctance to interpret independently what guidelines mean or to collaborate in order to define and solve problems. This tendency can, in turn, feed demand for more external clarification and regulation, followed by fear of transgression, and then resentful challenges to regulation.

b. Teachers' responses to political intervention

Studies of educational initiatives show that mechanisms which policy-makers use to try and secure organisational and pedagogic change are complex, contradictory and have

diverse, unintended effects. Similarly, teachers' and institutional managers' responses are varied and erratic. Such studies also show repeated waves of organisational and curricula change which try to shape educational meanings and purposes as well as aiming to affect teachers' work. They also highlight deep-seated barriers to implementing change effectively and productively (see Fullan, 1991; 1993; Helsby, 1999; Malen and Knapp, 1997)¹⁷.

Implementation of any assessment initiative is affected by different educational traditions, institutional and team cultures and teachers' personal beliefs. In the context of upheaval outlined above, the meso-politics of GNVQ teams fostered within institutions and arising from new systems of regulation, will be significant factors affecting teachers' responses. Upheaval in colleges, and under-funding of professional development (FEFC, 1999d), make it unlikely that few, if any, factors for dealing with relentless educational change, such as personal vision building, inquiry, mastery and collaboration (Fullan, 1993) will be evident in an analysis of GNVQs.

Another important factor in researching teachers' responses to policy is their own, and researchers', images of responses. 'Heroic resisters' and 'realistic subverters' emerge in various analyses of the National Curriculum (see for example, Helsby, 1999) and of developments in FE (see, for example, Ainley and Bailey, 1998; Avis, 1999¹⁸). These studies show polarisation between those who object to change and colleagues and managers who actively support both change and its underlying values. Yet, Gleeson and Shain argue (1999b) that it is important not to present interests as polarised because, despite discernible effects of 'new managerialism', FE as a workplace is not as controlled as some accounts suggest.

Research cited here, and discussion with college colleagues before the Ph.D began, suggest a complex picture of cynical compliance, creative implementation and minimalist interpretations, vehement and enthusiastic support and equally vehement

¹⁷ Although theories of educational change are important for understanding some problems with implementation of GNVQs, there is not space in this study to explore their application in depth.

¹⁸ See Seddons (1998) for similar accounts of responses to change in Australian technical colleges.

dislike of contextual change discussed here. Yet, despite upheavals summarised above, the professional resistance which greeted some aspects of the National Curriculum has not appeared publicly in FE: scenes, for example, of angry NUT conference delegates showing enormous piles of government guidelines for school teachers have not been paralleled in FE and, in contrast to Ted Wragg's pillorying in the Times Educational Supplement of the burden of National Curriculum assessment and inspection, there has been little media coverage.

Absence of public protest partly reflects preoccupation in FE with union disputes over conditions of service from 1993, but it also reflects how teachers are divided into cultures that might be broadly defined as academic and vocational, progressive and conservative, elitist and 'access'. Diverse traditions in FE exist: promoting access, equity and entitlement for 'non-traditional' learners; vocational and craft training; professional development and higher education; academic qualifications and re-sits; adult and community education; courses for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities¹⁹. Within subject areas, allegiances form over the awarding body that teachers deal with, since procedures for assessment and quality assurance embody certain traditions and ethos (Ecclestone, 1993; Ecclestone and Hall, 1999). Further fragmentation is created by the increasingly casualised workforce noted above.

More specifically, teachers' responses to policy change in the vocational curriculum through GNVQs can be related to the legacy of previous initiatives such as TVEI and CPVE. These set important precedents for sources and styles of political intervention and management of change within institutions, summarised briefly here.

Battles between "*two different modalities and voices*" in CPVE (Radnor et al 1989) were reflected in contrasting legislative powers in the two initiatives, as well as in a different cultural ethos between the DES and MSC. Dale et al (1989) argue that the DES was a

¹⁹ This thesis does not go into detail about the long-running academic/vocational divide that lies behind support for vocational initiatives, although its implications are discussed in the policy analysis of GNVQ developments in Chapter Six and teachers' responses to GNVQs in Chapter Eight. For detailed analysis of its effects in GNVQs see Edwards et al, 1997; Gleeson and Hodgkinson, 1995.

rule-bound bureaucracy unable to compel compliance. In contrast, the MSC was set up deliberately as an arm of government as a corporate body of different interests which could act quickly. It therefore saw education as a means of bringing about radical, system-wide changes while the DES worked to persuade and cajole within strongly-set policy boundaries (see also Ainley, 1999). Thus, the MSC saw TVEI as a means of *“exploring and testing ways of organising and managing the education of 14-19 year old young people”* (MSC cited by Dale et al, 1989, p85). MSC pushed for system-wide reform and centralised control while the DES emphasised local innovations via the LEAs. MSC's interventionary style was mirrored in the culture of the NCVQ and the pace with which it introduced GNVQ (Williams, 1999).

TVEI and CPVE set precedents for swift timescales for change, the rapid movement of resources to priority areas and regular external monitoring at national and local levels. Significantly for GNVQs, TVEI in particular paved the way for more structure and control of the curriculum:

despite frequent reference to the idea of students managing their own learning processes, the environment in which this might occur must itself be structured and managed in order to meet the criteria for whatever learning outcomes may be previously established.. (Dale et al, 1989, p86)

The new mandate reflected in the TVEI meant that:

the degree of autonomy of the education system, schools and teachers, and the ways that autonomy was alleged to have been used, made the system as much part of the problem the new mandate addressed...The mandate implied not only changes in the orientation of education policy but changes in the way these changes were devised and introduced into the system.." (1989, p86)

TVEI raised suspicions about professional autonomy in ways that CPVE, despite more hegemony in its curriculum prescription, did not: the *"perceived monolithic facelessness of the MSC"* generated 'professional paranoia' (ibid p86). This has parallels later in hostile responses to the NCVQ's role in developing GNVQs (for example, Hyland, 1994). TVEI also insinuated a *'vocational ethos into the conventional rhetorics of*

education policy-making and implementation" (Dale et al, 1989, p87) whilst maintaining a general language of specification which allowed a diversity of local responses. Importantly, despite David Young's resistance as Secretary of State,(Young, 1990), TVEI was mediated by LEAs and their advisors whose *"delicate task of incursive diplomacy"* did not threaten the identities and autonomy of educationalists. It did, however, provide *"a basis for transformation which appear[ed] to articulate with conventionally established perspectives at all levels"* (Dale et al, p87) and, like CPVE, offered some teachers scope for innovation and career prospects. Combined with a powerful rhetoric of widening access for 'non-traditional' students, this approach seems to gain support from many teachers in vocational and pre-vocational education. Again, this is relevant to FE teachers' responses to GNVQ, evaluated in Chapter Seven of this study.

TVEI therefore challenged the rhythm and pace of educational development: change became a requirement rather than a response to exhortation by the DES. Evocations of 'participation' appeared in guidance from LEAs to schools and colleges and were used in communicative processes from MSC, to the DES, through every level of implementation and the teacher/pupil relationship itself (ibid. p88). Discourses of intervention and motivating 'non-traditional' students in both initiatives therefore paved the way for OBA to become communicated to teachers via what Bates calls a *"textually mediated discourse"* (1998b, p45) and a prescriptive GNVQ assessment system.

SUMMARY

Precedents set by previous initiatives in vocational education show how policy development and implementation continues patterns of regulation and intervention alongside new approaches. This chapter has also aimed to locate policy and implementation in a broader ideological context. Concerns about non-participation in lifelong learning raise questions, for example, about whether political regulation of assessment in lifelong learning could be justified by a form of 'compulsory social motivation'.

A climate of risk aversion and low expectations of human agency could infect expectations of the types of motivation and autonomy that learners are capable of developing. In addition, this climate could make it difficult for teachers and learners to take risks, be innovative or creative or to negotiate their own curriculum, encouraging a view that such activities are risky and undesirable. This might also increase cynicism about the potential for learners to be intrinsically motivated and autonomous. Although I am not aiming to explore empirically constructs of 'risk' amongst policy-makers, teachers and students, the values and beliefs that underpin policy and assessment practice might be affected by new but subtle characterisations of risk, as well as by the specific configuration of particular policy initiatives and organisational change.

The types of motivation and autonomy developed by teachers and students implementing an assessment policy designed to foster such attributes are therefore rooted in the macro and meso context examined so far. A theoretical framework for evaluating the development of motivation and autonomy through assessment practices is discussed next.

CHAPTER 3

AUTONOMY, MOTIVATION AND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Changing political, social and cultural roles for assessment, and technologies through which to promote them, have produced important theoretical, ideological and technical shifts in assessment systems since the 1970s (see A. Hargreaves, 1989; Gipps, 1994; Wolf, 1995; Broadfoot, 1996; Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Filer, 2000). Two are particularly relevant for this study. The first is a move away from the dominance of psychometric testing, and belief in learners' innate *ability*, towards assessment which enhances motivation and improves learning, based on belief in learners' innate *potential*. Although belief in innate ability does not limit the idea that people can develop talent, tension between the two emphases explains many conflicts in education policy. The second shift is an intensification of large-scale, criterion-referenced systems designed, regulated and evaluated by government agencies. This shift challenges norm-referenced modes administered by teachers and external examiners, and reflects a modernist faith that technical rationality can define and measure a growing range of attributes and skills. Yet, the extreme performativity of assessment technology seems to be at odds with a political commitment to motivating and empowering individuals for lifelong learning (see Broadfoot, 2000; Torrance, 2000).

In the context explored in Chapter Two, discourses surrounding autonomy, motivation and formative assessment are likely to be acquiring new meanings and losing others. Some emerge through a fairly uniform policy rhetoric where official documents, evaluation and inspection reports, development projects and subsequent amendments to

an assessment model, create certain themes for debate. Other are lost or gained in policy transmission and amendment and in conflicting traditions of progressivism and empowerment in the vocational curriculum (see Hodkinson, 1989; Bates et al, 1998). As a result, the subsequent beliefs, values and assumptions of teachers and students are *"subject to shifting justifications in response to political, social and educational factors"* (Bates et al, 1998, p110). In relation to meanings associated with autonomy and motivation, Wittgenstein's advice is pertinent:

sometimes an expression has to be withdrawn from language and sent for cleaning - then it can be put back into circulation.. (Wittgenstein quoted by Coffield 1997b, p454)

This 'cleaning' is particularly apposite when an OBA model is itself *"reconstructed in each terrain it passes, depending on the histories, purposes and meanings which actors bring to it.."* (Bates, 1998b, p43).

This chapter addresses three specific problems in exploring discourses and meanings to the epistemology and implementation of GNVQ assessment. First, theories of autonomy and motivation held by key actors, mediators of policy, teachers and students, are likely to be largely implicit. Second, the theories of learning that ideas about motivation and autonomy derive from, namely constructivism and behaviourism, are not widely understood, nor are their links to formative and summative assessment practices. Third, it is necessary to examine the technical nuances of the three OBA models in GNVQs between 1992 and 1999 since these obscure any underlying theories of learning.

Section One summarises key themes in research into motivation and autonomy. It proposes a theoretical framework for exploring connections between different types of motivation and autonomy and formative assessment practices.

Section Two discusses how different theories of formative assessment affect the types of autonomy and motivation that students might develop.

Section Three relates different types of autonomy to an examination of GNVQ assessment specifications.

Section Four summarises the implications of discussion in the first three chapters for developing learners' autonomy and motivation in GNVQs in FE colleges.

1. MOTIVATION, AUTONOMY AND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

a. Motivation

There is a growing perception that, in comparison to other countries, the UK has a cultural problem of poor motivation (for example, Fevre et al, 1999; Elliott, 1999). Recent research into motivation for learning goes beyond a long-running distinction in cognitive psychology between individuals' extrinsic and intrinsic 'drives' and a corresponding emphasis on different types of reward and stimulus. Briefly, two main traditions underpin this distinction, namely behaviourism and humanism. Although divisions between extrinsic and intrinsic motives are not clear-cut, behaviourism emphasises extrinsic motives based on external goals, performance rewards and short-term goals. In contrast, humanism prioritises intrinsic motives, such as striving for self-regulation of personal attributes and subject expertise, followed by desire for higher levels of creativity and fulfillment and what Maslow termed 'self actualisation' (see, for example, Rogers, 1983; West, 1995).

In encouraging a move from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, cognitive psychologists explore the effects on attitudes to particular learning situations of factors such as learners' beliefs, values and emotions, with corresponding advice for teachers about how to harness these productively (for example, Newton, 2000). The teachers' role is therefore to adopt effective strategies to maximise intrinsic motivation as far as possible and to use extrinsic motivators sparingly. For Doug Newton, intrinsic motivation is linked inextricably to opportunities to develop 'self-regulation' and the skills of metacognition, namely the ability to review and monitor the effectiveness of one's approaches to

learning. There is also particular interest in the effects on motivation of learners' attributions of achievement to ability, task difficulty or effort (Black and Wiliam, 1998). It is widely accepted in research reviewed here that attributions of performance to effort are more productive than attributions to ability, and more likely to lead to intrinsic motivation.

Critics of OBA attack 'behaviourist' pre-defined outcomes and their instrumental effects on motivation (for example, Hyland, 1994). These objections resonate with criticism that assessment in the National Curriculum reinforces extrinsic motivation and attributions of achievement to intelligence and task difficulty rather than to effort and intrinsically worthwhile aspects of learning. Such features also undermine pupils' willingness to tolerate ambiguity (see Black and Wiliam, 1998; Ball, 1999; Broadfoot, 2000). These accounts promote the power of intrinsic motivation to sustain deep, creative learning and to resist over-emphasis on short-term rewards and surface engagement. Unless this can be achieved, and social motivation harnessed, the inspiring rhetoric of lifelong learning will have little effect (Coffield, 1997a; Broadfoot, 2000).

Nevertheless, it is possible to discern two problems with the current dichotomy in research into motivation between extrinsic and intrinsic factors. First, there may be a tendency to contrast impoverished instrumentalism unfavourably with compelling but perhaps idealistic portrayals of intrinsic commitments to high levels of craft skills in specialised, small communities of practice (for example, Lave, 1997), faith in motivation generated by a 'love of learning' and the desire for mastery (for example, Bruner, 1966) or civic and moral commitments (for example, Barnett et al, 1999). Second, there is a tendency to prioritise *individual* traits and attributes and a diagnostic role for teachers in responding to these. In their review of theories of pedagogy in adult learning and higher education, Zukas and Malcolm argue that this isolates learners from social and personal histories and contexts (2000). It also, as Chapter Two showed, overlooks the power of social motivation and commitment.

In response to these limitations, a growing body of research on motivation addresses the effects of social and cultural dispositions on teachers' strategies and children's attitudes and learning habits. Elliott et al (1999) analyse attitudes and activities amongst school children and teachers in Russia, Kentucky and the North-east of England to argue that the most influential perspective in motivation research in the last decade has been the "*effects of attributional biases on goal-seeking behaviour*" (p77). Only comparatively recently have motivational theorists recognised the importance of social goals in learners' goals for achievement. The study by Elliott et al highlights the power of peer and family attitudes to both the intrinsic and extrinsic value of education and to the sustained effort necessary for high standards. Importantly, they question whether current motivation research places too much emphasis on the importance of attribution of achievement to effort. In their study, pupils' attributions of achievement to effort did not necessarily improve workrates or performance.

Sociological perspectives on motivation and social capital aim to capture social and cultural dimensions in order to counter an over-individualistic emphasis on motivation. They also consider how cultural change might transform instrumental motivation and relate motivation to broader conditions. Fevre et al (1999) argue, for example, that divisions of labour within organisations and society as a whole, together with opportunities in the labour market, affect collective representations of motivation, as do community cultures and traditions of participation in non-formal and formal learning¹. Motivation for particular goals, and responses to assessment, are also affected by students' attributions of achievement to factors outside their control (an idea that ability is innate, difficulty with particular tasks or luck) or intrinsic factors such as effort. These attributions are both individually and socially constructed (see Torrance and Pryor 1998; Reay and Wiliam, 1999) and culturally situated, particularly in relation to perceptions of socio-economic prospects, family attitudes and peer perceptions of what 'acceptable' behaviour (see Elliott et al, 1999; Hufton and Elliott, 1999).

¹ Michael Eraut identifies 'formal' learning (organised and structured usually as part of institutionally-based programmes), 'informal' (*ad hoc*, incidental, usually tacit) and 'non-formal' (structured by learners themselves) (1999).

Socio-cultural dimensions also suggest that discussion of motivation which excludes social differentiation and unequal opportunities, and privileges low self-esteem and apathy, leads to a naïve view of non-participation or poor motivation in formal learning (Coffield, 2000b). It is therefore important to explore intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and socio-cultural dimensions of learning, as well as individual traits and attitudes. Martin Bloomer (1997), for example, argues that dispositions towards learning and achievement are "*socially and culturally grounded*" and profoundly affected by personal identities. Motivation and approaches to learning cannot, therefore, be isolated from the unstable yet important contexts of learners' own interests (ibid), the strictures of externally imposed prescriptions for learning, and broader cultural attitudes within particular localities (see Gorrard et al, 1999; Elliott et al, op cit). In addition, Stephen Brookfield argues that theories of motivation rarely acknowledge the emotional and traumatic effects of learning on students' identities and sense of self (2000).

Recent research into post-16 learners' characteristic dispositions towards choices for career or study and learning shows that 'pragmatic acceptance' of the need to gain a qualification is the most prevalent motive, where education is 'something to be got through'. Outside a core of pragmatic acceptors, are 'hangers on', reluctantly in education and vulnerable to sudden disruption of this choice (see Macrae et al, 1997; Ball et al, 1999). Their motives, ostensibly instrumental, relate to getting jobs and putting off life decisions by staying on in education and are often interwoven with uncertainty, lack of real direction, lack of positive self-reinforcement or self-worth. Bloomer and Hodgkinson (1997; 1999) found that 'strategic compliance' dominates many FE students' attitudes to assessment and that for the 'drifters' in their analysis even extrinsic motivation is absent. Under pressure of credentialism and individualistic self-interest, Macrae et al, (1997) argue that 'drifters' and 'hangers on' risk becoming marginalised. The most precarious group motivated to do GNVQs are likely to be the notional and pragmatic acceptors.

In contrast, learners 'embedded' in the system see education as a natural development of previous experience and part of the process of 'becoming somebody'. They have a strong vested interest in the value of credentialism and are well informed about available

choices. These learners' sense of self and identification with peers is inextricably linked with gaining expertise in a subject, having good relationships with teachers and peers and enjoying an identity built around being a student (see Macrae et al, 1997; Ball et al, 1999).

It seems, then, that empirical evaluation of the types of motivation that students might develop in the structural context outlined in Chapter Two has, simultaneously, to differentiate between social and individual motivation, locate these forms in a broader socio-cultural context and account for progression between extrinsic and intrinsic motives. Acknowledging the powerful motivating influences of 'self determination' and 'personal agency', Prenzel et al (1999) draw from cognitive psychology to offer "*a systematically ordered spectrum of constructs which are psychologically differentiated and at the same time, can be found within educational contexts*" (1999, p1). Although my own study does not measure constructs of motivation through psychometric tests, as Prenzel et al do, the categories they offer are extremely useful in accounting for the types of motivation that learners might develop and for fluctuations between these types. Prenzel et al summarise motivation as:

- a. **Amotivated:** lacking any direction for motivation, from indifference to apathy
- b. **External:** learning takes place only "*in association with reinforcement, reward, or to avoid threat or punishment*".
- c. **Introjected:** learning happens when learners 'internalise' or 'incorporate' "*an external supportive structure*". Although it is internal, it is not a self-determined form of motivation.
- d. **Identified:** learning occurs "*as a result of accepting content or activities which for its sake holds no incentive (it may even be a burden) but it is recognised as necessary and important in attaining a goal [the learner] has set*".

- e. **Intrinsic:** learning “*results independently from external contingencies*”. Learners perceive any incentives to be gained as being intrinsic to the content or activity.
- f. **Interested:** learning does not merely recognise intrinsic value but takes place “*in accordance with subjective and meaningful attributes assigned to the object or object-specific skill*” (Prenzel et al, 1999, p1-2)

As Prenzel et al point out:

From an educational point of view, motivation theories take on relevance if they empirically predict how the different motivational states impact [on] learning and teaching processes. On this basis, it is possible to systematically differentiate between motivation states as being either (more or less) questionable or desirable with respect to educational objectives (ibid.).

A spectrum of motivational states could help counter a danger of portraying distinctions between humanist and behaviourist, extrinsic and intrinsic, individual and social, as mutually exclusive. Humanist perspectives in particular seem to underplay the idea that extrinsic, individual motivation, represented as *external*, *introjected* and *identified*, may often be a springboard for *intrinsic*, *interested* (Prenzel, et al) and social motivation. This chapter proposes that motivation may link to different types of autonomy. In turn, motivation and autonomy can be linked to different formative assessment practices and different purposes for using them.

However, before turning to discussion of autonomy, a significant slippage remains in how the literature discussed so far uses the term ‘learning’. It denotes procedures and activities, complex processes such as ‘metacognition’ and ‘skill transfer’ and achievement of qualifications. There is not space here to provide an extensive definition but it may be helpful to adopt Michael Eraut’s proposition that “*learning is a significant change in capability or understanding and exclude the acquisition of further information when it does not contribute to such changes*” (Eraut quoted by Coffield, 1997, p5, emphasis as in original).

A final gap in theories of motivation discussed above may be that post-16 students in FE fall between research that explores the motivation of children in compulsory settings and research which aims to account for ‘distinctive’ aspects of adult learning.

b. AUTONOMY

Diverse terms, underlying constructs and purposes for ‘autonomy’ slip confusingly, and often vaguely, through academic studies of OBA and official literature for GNVQs (discussed in Chapter One) and, more generally, through studies of motivation, discussed above. In his review of research on autonomy in education, David Boud shows that ‘independent learning’, ‘taking responsibility for one’s own learning’, ‘self-determination’, ‘self-regulation’, ‘autonomy’ tend to be used generally and interchangeably (1988).

It can therefore be seen as a general *goal* of education: an individual’s ability to be independent from external authority and “*free from disabling conflicts*” in one’s personality, the freedom to act and work as s/he chooses (Gibbs quoted by Boud, 1988, p18-19). Bill Law characterises autonomy as the ‘*command of a repertoire of responses*’ for acting and thinking, the ability to transcend boundaries and social barriers, to challenge set ways of thinking or expectations about one’s ‘station in life’ (ref). Rooted in notions of political self-government, meritocracy and democratic citizenship based on ‘free’ but socially committed and fulfilled individuals, liberal humanist notions of ‘self determination’ and ‘self actualisation’ all underpin these ideals. As Chapter Four shows, ideals rooted in Western traditions of ‘Enlightenment’ are contested and controversial, particularly in relation to debates about structure, agency and identity. Nevertheless, they exert a strong influence in the literature discussed here.

Although he acknowledges that the term ‘autonomy’ is often used vaguely, Law points to some implicit meanings in educational uses that apply, as he does, to careers guidance, or to autonomy within a learning context:

We have some idea of what we are talking about when we use it – when our students or clients are acting consciously (not without thought), independently (not compliantly), imaginatively (not routinely) and with commitment (not remotely) (Law, 1992, p152).

From this perspective, autonomy is synonymous with critical thinking, the ability to define what is morally acceptable, to choose alternatives between conflicting ideas, to have a 'mind of one's own' (Dearden, quoted by Boud, op cit, p19).

In addition to autonomy as a goal, some psychologists portray it as a cognitive *process*, deriving from tacit and overt meta-cognitive planning, monitoring and reviewing of one's learning and integral to intrinsic motivation and deep engagement with learning (Newton, 2000). Brookfield argues that adults develop a self-conscious capacity to 'know how they know what they know' and also to employ 'practical logic' to new situations, based on experience. These capabilities are, he argues, distinctive characteristics of adults' autonomy as learners (2000). Carl Rogers links goals of democratic liberal humanism to these psychological processes to argue for a radical, naturalistic approach where learners are free to determine, set, carry out and assess their own goals (op cit.)

However, discussion slips quickly from democratic ideals and cognitive processes to portray autonomy as a *procedure* or *method*, such as action planning, flexible access to resources, independence from structures and didactic teaching. Nevertheless, "*a person may be exposed to so-called autonomous methods of learning without internalising the values of autonomy or necessarily being enabled to think and act autonomously*" (Candy, quoted by Boud, op cit, p21).

Slippage between terms and underlying purposes of autonomy and motivation suggests a need to gain 'empirical purchase' (Haywood, 1997) on them. The typology below draws on discussion of different goals for action research in pursuit of professional autonomy (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Carr 1995). It extends a framework that explored different goals for 'reflective practice' in professional development programmes (Ecclestone, 1996b). The typology proposes that autonomy can be *procedural* (technical); *personal*

(practical - as in one's own 'practice'); *critical* and, ultimately, *emancipatory*. It relates autonomy to three different models of teaching and learning: *transmission*, *transaction* or *transformation* (see Haywood, op cit.). Each type of autonomy suggests a different basis for motivation, with different implications for who defines knowledge and outcomes and for how teachers and students engage with these definitions. In turn, each type of autonomy and motivation suggests different formative assessment practices.

This typology is discussed below and summarised in Figure 1 at the end of this chapter. Of course, the distinctions and overlaps indicated by a model based on categories are imperfect and sometimes arbitrary. It is exploratory and needs further theoretical refining but offers a basis in this study for empirical analysis of links between assessment, autonomy and motivation in post-compulsory education².

Procedural autonomy

Learners might gain autonomy through control over pace, timing and evaluation of work, negotiation over types of learning activities, flexibility in what counts as 'appropriate' evidence of achievement. Outcomes and assessment criteria can be drawn more or less tightly, be pre-defined or negotiated. Learners therefore become pro-active within a set of rules and responsibilities, developing their independence in using techniques or processes, as well as confidence with a body of technical or specialist language. Some qualification frameworks, for example, formulate procedural autonomy at different levels, in competences such as "*undertake directed activities with limited autonomy within time constraints (level 2); select from considerable choice in familiar and unfamiliar contexts (level 3)*" (NICATs, 1998).

In prescriptive OBA systems, autonomy can become an imposed, *technical empowerment*. In GNVQs, for example, grade criteria reward planning, managing and

²The framework is being used in action research to improve assessment practice at Massey University, New Zealand (Swann and Ecclestone, in progress)

evaluating one's work within tight confines, turning students into 'hunters and gatherers' of information without deep engagement with either content or process (Bates, 1998a). Arising from wider developments in human resource management and quality assurance, procedural autonomy prepares students for work practices of team-work, initiative and the self-reliance of devolved responsibility within "*much stricter frameworks of accountability and performance appraisal* (Bates, 1998a, p13). Such attributes are intertwined with notions of enterprise and responsibility for one's own employability (Bates, 1998a; Helsby et al, 1998). Autonomy in OBA systems may therefore become a 'technology' of self-surveillance (see Edwards and Usher, 1994; Bates, 1991).

Procedural autonomy relates to *transmission* of pre-defined outcomes, knowledge, processes and content by teachers, or through open-learning and computer-based materials. It could also involve *transaction* over how tasks might be done, underpinned by Prenzel et al's categories of *external* and *introjected* motivation³. Teacher and self-assessment focuses on checking that criteria are met whilst rewarding short-term goals and the replication of information. Side-effects are likely to be 'surface' learning to 'get through' the criteria.

In devising a typology of autonomy, criticism that procedural autonomy is unprogressive may overlook its initial importance: confidence with procedures, systems, and the technical language underpinning particular subjects, may be integral to gaining confidence with more sophisticated forms of planning, new activities or engaging with concepts behind terminology. There may also be necessary progression from learners making decisions with support and then judging when support is and is not needed. Although there is an important but easily overlooked distinction between learners' *self-direction* and their *accountability* (Bates, 1998b), procedural autonomy may actually be a pre-requisite or a co-requisite for more sophisticated forms of autonomy. This view is supported by Newton (2000) who argues for a deliberate progression:

³ At a push, their category of *amotivation* might be enough to get students through!

Paradoxically, facility in self-regulation (of learning) can develop from external regulation. Success is when external support is removed and self-regulation stands alone (p166).

Personal autonomy

Humanist ideas about people's drive to become self-directing suggest another form of autonomy based on knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses, learning habits and potential choices for action and progression. These insights are perhaps the beginning of a 'repertoire of responses' discussed above, and 'self actualisation'. For Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Carr (1995), deep reflection on one's occupational or professional practice and engagement with ethical and moral standpoints enhances self-knowledge and the ability to make moral choices. Some accounts of autonomy advocate self-knowledge but link it implicitly to procedural and critical autonomy:

The learner is aware of him or herself as a learner, when he or she knows and understands the learning context, has the necessary skills to negotiate and function appropriately within that context; can critically review the integration of new learning and set his or her learning agenda. (Garrigan, 1997, p169).

The typology proposes that personal autonomy is underpinned by Prenzel et al's categories of *identified*, *intrinsic* and, ideally, *interested* motivation. It requires learners and teachers to attribute achievement to effort and engagement, developed through good relationships and *transaction* between teachers and peers. Learning becomes more student-centred, based on negotiation of intended outcomes and how to achieve them. There is an emphasis on positive interdependence amongst learners, co-operative approaches to problem-setting and problem-solving, and negotiated processes of evaluation, review and recording of achievement.

Personal autonomy therefore derives from social rather than individual processes and from constructivist ideas about learning, discussed in the next section. In addition, people who draw on experiences outside immediate family or schooling "*nourish a*

diversity of perspectives in conceiving a future and alternative futures” (Law, 1992, p164). Ipsative targets, alongside individualised feedback and criteria for assessing individual progress are also important, as are peer assessment and mentoring.

Ultimately, students’ ability to “*see it all another way*” (ibid.), to go beyond awareness of their strengths and weaknesses or a preoccupation with personal attributes, to appraise their position within a wider context, are all inextricably linked to critical autonomy, to structural conditions affecting prospects and learners’ perceptions of them.

Critical autonomy

For many educators, critical autonomy counters narrow vocationalism, thereby developing democratic citizenship based on critical intelligence (see, for example, Avis et al, 1996; Ross, 1995; Coffield, 1999a; Ainley, 1999) and students’ ability “*to free themselves from the constraints under which they are already thinking and acting*” (Barnett, 1994, p191). Critical autonomy is widely held to emerge through subject expertise, where engagement with established bodies of thought, participation in associated conversations enables people to develop new possibilities for understanding beyond conventional insights and wisdom (Barnett, 1997, p37; see also Candy, 1988). From a more radical tradition, learners “*participate in determining the content of learning..or what counts as educational knowledge*” (Young cited by Bates, 1998a, p11) (see also Ainley, 1999). Without the capacity to see the world another way, Law asserts that ‘*there is no negotiation*’ between teachers and students (op cit, p164)

Other dimensions to critical autonomy are suggested by some adults who came into higher education as ‘non-traditional’ students from ‘Access’ routes and now believe that modular, vocational degrees have not met their social and cultural needs or developed their intellectual or critical depth and the ability to make connections between ideas. A desire to contribute to their deprived communities leads them to seek social, political and cultural education from bodies such as the Workers’ Education Association (Ross, 1995).

Yet, critical autonomy can attract worthy but vacuous proselytising, a problem that applies also to notions of 'empowerment' (Fielding, 1996). And, as Barnett points out, *"almost everyone is in favour of critical thinking but we have no proper account of it"* (Barnett, 1997, p2). This implies a need for closer theoretical exploration of critical autonomy, together with empirical accounts of where and how it might be fostered, and what role formative assessment practices might play in this.

In support of a subject base for critical thinking, John Halliday challenges the idea that it can be a 'core skill' bolted onto vocational programmes to bridge the academic/vocational divide:

the idea that critical thinking is a core skill superficially appeals to both the liberal educator's concern with personal autonomy and the vocational educator's desire for flexible technicians capable of solving technical problems (Halliday, 1998, p4).

Instead, his research with a Scottish GNVQ course in Health and Social Care shows that problem-solving, 'critical analysis' and 'critical evaluation' appear increasingly as assessable 'skills', alongside team working and evaluating one's own work. Yet, appropriating critical thinking in this way obscures different interpretations of 'critical'. It can, for example, be equated with being a 'good thinker' and therefore a good (canny) worker. In a different sense (and therefore less desirable in some occupations or at some levels of workplace responsibility) it involves a willingness to challenge accepted ideas and to think independently: *"in this sense a critical thinker might be something of a maverick, always challenging accepted norms even when it seems foolish to do so"* (ibid, p7). Brookfield argues that such tensions can be particularly traumatic for adults 'becoming critical' through educational experiences, where peers or family may resent this new attribute (2000). In addition, if critical autonomy means a critique of one's own position, to think critically, to challenge or even transform situations collectively, Fielding questions how much can really be achieved in the daily reality of institutions (op cit.)

Nor is critical autonomy a counter to vocational instrumentalism. Halliday argues that many academics privilege the type of thinking which is "*detached from interested action*", suggesting that one side of the divide is in need of a 'curricular supplement'. Instead, the particular cultures of academic or vocational subjects, professions or occupations affect whether certain forms of critical challenge are accepted or valued. In many cases:

there is a balance to be struck between endless criticality and acquiescent action. In these cases, it is widely accepted that progress is made by the maintenance of an essential tension between acceptance of norms and values of communities in which people have an interest to challenge those norms (ibid, p17).

The types of critical thinking that students engage in, and the aims behind them, are therefore complex, imprecise and laden with ambiguities. Such tensions have important implications for teachers' and students' constructions of autonomy, and particularly of critical autonomy. Essentially, constructions are embedded within the content and aims of vocational and academic disciplines, expressed through syllabi and assessment specifications and teachers' and students' engagement with them.⁴ Halliday argues that it is essential to connect critical thinking with a subject:

the idea that critical thinking is a kind of super practice, capable of prioritising moves within different practices can only be supported if there are communities of critical thinkers united in a conception of what this super practice is for (my emphasis) (ibid, p17)

Constructions will also be affected by beliefs amongst curriculum designers, awarding body officers, inspectors, teachers and students about the purpose of critical autonomy, and the potential that learners have for developing it.

⁴ A special edition of *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (4, 4 1999) shows that critical thinking is embedded in precise ways within university teachers' own engagement with their subject and the teaching methods they use.

In response to difficult philosophical and political questions raised in this section, the typology offers a basis for evaluating what critical autonomy appears to mean within particular assessment systems and how or why it is developed. It proposes that *transaction* and *transformation* build upon problem-solving and collaboration within a particular subject or occupational context. Transaction goes beyond negotiation of procedures and suitable assessment evidence to a belief that knowledge is dynamic, uncertain and contestable. Diverse activities, formal and informal discourses, openness and creativity build a community of practice. Within this, constructive and self-regulating processes (see Haywood, 1997; Lave, 1997) enable learners to climb to a 'high ground' for surveying their own knowledge and processes of learning (Bruner cited by Torrance and Pryor, 1998, p39) (see also Brookfield, 2000). Importantly, teachers act as models, making subtle judgements about the sort of intervention that learners need, when to provide it and when to remove it.

In a similarly strategic way, assessment should encourage evaluation and critical reflection and engage with dilemmas in subject disciplines and social or work-place issues. In addition, assessors and learners need to conduct oral and written 'critical conversations' so that learners can assess their own work and relate its quality to that of peers and immediate superiors. They need to be confident in transforming feedback into a more sophisticated critical understanding and know how to interpret and use teachers' often idiosyncratic oral and written comments on their work.

Other assessment practices for critical autonomy are familiar as teaching methods, such as asking questions to increase understanding, or to diagnose barriers to understanding, creating classroom climates where people feel able to debate, challenge and question, or ask curriculum-related questions of each other and teachers⁵. In the light of arguments so far, strategic development of critical autonomy requires commitments to 'partnership' in an assessment community and insights about the significance of different questioning and

⁵Black and Wiliam argue that 'outstandingly effective' teachers use frequent questioning, with 60% of questions asked by students (1998a). A useful literature on using classroom questions effectively (for example Morgan and Saxton 1991) and developing 'thinking skills' (Leat, in progress) would be useful in follow-up analysis of assessment practices.

feedback techniques. Torrance and Pyror, for example, show that children vary greatly in how they interpret their role in the social rituals that surround assessment, and their responses to them (1998). This may mark the beginning of their 'assessment careers' as socialised responses to assessment systems.

However, links between personal and critical autonomy, and between transaction and transformation, are blurred and iterative. Edwards et al show, for example, that pedagogy in both GNVQs and A-levels displays characteristics of transaction, transformation and transmission (1997). In addition, without explication of underlying purposes, rhetoric about self-regulation and self-determination can denote limited forms of procedural and personal autonomy through apparently autonomous activities. Formative assessment might also be transforming if it develops personal autonomy but not necessarily lead to critical autonomy. Yet, arguably, assessment cannot develop critical autonomy *unless* it is transformatory and challenging.

Notwithstanding the need for progression between different forms of autonomy, curricula that assess different types of autonomy at certain levels or grades can overlook other forms until a specific stage or level. It is also important to recognise that critical autonomy may take many years and specialist expertise to develop and that it disappears, temporarily, when learners confront a new subject domain (Candy, 1988). The typology explored here therefore offers a holistic view of autonomy, with connections between different types as a basis for testing how different groups associated with GNVQs conceptualise autonomy and motivation and relate them to assessment practices.

2.THEORIES OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

a. Behaviourism and constructivism

The previous section suggested how formative assessment practices might relate to each of three types of autonomy. Some activities are categorised easily as 'assessment', such as giving students feedback about their progress and setting targets for improvement. Others are associated with classroom questioning and feedback, and tutorials. Yet, theoretical and practical understanding of links between formative assessment, autonomy and motivation, depend on formative assessment being seen as "*a moment of learning, and students have to be active in their own assessment and to picture their own learning in light of an understanding of what it means to get better*" (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, p29).

Discussion so far seems to bear out an early assumption behind this study, that diverse constituencies constructing and using the GNVQ assessment model are unlikely to be immersed in theories of learning and their links to assessment practices. More fundamentally, the research literature reviewed so far, discussion with teachers on in-service degree and Masters' programmes, and my own experience (see Chapter One), reveal confusion over the differences between formative, diagnostic and summative assessment. In addition, the term 'formative assessment' "*does not have a tightly defined and widely accepted meaning*" (Black and Wiliam, op cit, p7). A major difficulty in conceptualising and operationalising it is that claims for its benefits have been both overstated and over-simplified (Torrance, 1993; Black and Wiliam, op cit; Torrance and Pryor, 1998).

It is therefore unsurprising that theories of learning embedded in the design of GNVQs are not articulated (see Boys, 2000). Like most, if not all, assessment systems, GNVQs blend vague, contradictory ideas with an array of assessment practices and purposes. Nonetheless, the first GNVQ model evolved as part of a broader shift towards conceptions of 'educational' assessment and greater expectations that assessment could

be a motivating device. These expectations devolve responsibility for formal assessment to teachers, requiring them to assess complex and numerous skills and qualities in authentic contexts and to be accountable for reliability and validity. Not only does this extend the scope of formal and informal assessment, but it blurs formative and continuous assessment with collecting summative evidence of achievement (see Jessup, 1994).

This merging of processes and purposes alters relationships between teachers and students, and by prioritising teacher (internal) assessment, it alters the relationship between government, awarding bodies and teachers (see Harlen, 1995; Wilmot, 1999; Ecclestone and Hall, 1999). In the macro context of socio-economic change and the meso context of FE colleges, discussed in Chapter Two, these new relationships become threatening for teachers. New forms of accountability are demanded at the same time as resource constraints (for example, lack of staff development, intensified teaching contracts, cuts in course hours), increased student numbers and a wider range of incoming qualifications and motivation, institutional restructuring and poor staff training.

Further difficulty arises from the way that two contradictory psychological traditions appear in GNVQs where behaviourist objectives rooted in positivist epistemology sit alongside constructivist ideas about negotiation over both content and evidence. It is possible to infer from official guidance discussed in Chapter One, and specifications from the 1993 model discussed in Section Three below, that boundaries between generating and assessing knowledge, and processes for planning, managing and evaluating learning are negotiable and transactionary. It is also possible to infer goals of procedural autonomy and critical autonomy associated with meta-cognition. Yet, as specifications for 1995 and 1996 models show below, other notions of autonomy can also be inferred.

More broadly, behaviourist and constructivist notions of assessment connect with theories of human and social capital. Specification of outcomes and criteria lend themselves, for example, to conditions where there are less resources and demand for group contact: in theory, individuals can pursue their own goals with minimal recourse to

peers or teachers and without any social commitment to or from them. Behaviourism can also be linked to the ideology of risk aversion discussed in Chapter Two where the apparently neutral authority of technical rationality codifies then regulates human behaviour. In a climate of low trust, behaviourist assessment may also respond pragmatically to low expectations of shared social goals and commitments and encourage teachers and institutions to overlook their importance in assessment communities.

In contrast, theories of constructivism require communal motivation, together with creation of, and commitment to, social capital. This requires teachers to focus on relationships and networks, both in the community of practice that a learning programme fosters within an institution, and in the wider community. Yet, constructivist assessment is less predictable, less amenable to regulation than behaviourist assessment. Seen in this light, when behaviourist models incorporate constructivist techniques and a liberal humanist discourse, they offer a comforting, low risk approach to learning. This might confirm fears that humanist beliefs can become a mere technology (Rogers, 1983).

A combination of epistemologies and discourses in GNVQs creates a rhetoric that formative assessment can 'lead naturally' into the requirements of summative assessment. Yet, conceptually and practically, this presents difficulties. Black and Wiliam argue, for example, that formative assessment requires 'radical change' in classroom pedagogy since it is integral to the learning and teaching process (Black and Wiliam, 1998a). This implies that if teachers see formative assessment as 'just part of what I do anyway', they will not appreciate the need to understand theories about assessment and then to relate them to changes in practice. Without this, formative assessment is no more than continuous summative assessment.

From a constructivist perspective, formative assessment is inseparable from classroom activities discussed above. It requires a belief in learners' potential which discourages ideas of fixed or 'innate' ability, attributes achievement to effort rather than ability and encourages collaboration within a community of learners, committed, ideally, to developing everyone's potential for learning. Earlier discussion of the ideological context for lifelong learning, and socio-cultural expectations of achievement discussed in Section

Two of this chapter, shows that “*the broader context of assumptions about the motivations and self-perceptions of learners*” will impact upon the effectiveness of formative assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, p16).

Constructivist models of learning encourage teachers and more expert peers amongst students and the wider community to work collaboratively with less expert learners. The gap between where learners are, the work they can produce with help from a teacher or a more expert peer, and achievement of the desired standard, become a focus for 'scaffolding' tasks and questions. In parallel, feedback moves from detailed support to more general advice or questions as learners gain confidence and expertise in translating feedback into improvements and new goals (see, for example, Gipps, 1994; Black and Wiliam op cit). It is therefore necessary to use diagnostic assessment, followed by differentiated activities and feedback and remedial support. Although many colleges now use diagnostic tests on entry to learning programmes, formative assessment is unlikely to affect motivation and autonomy positively unless diagnosis is incorporated into strategies for encouraging motivation, then into pedagogy linked to subject content, feedback and support.

Despite growing interest in constructivist assessment, Torrance and Pryor (1998) show how a behaviourist tradition endures in schools. Extrinsic motivation based on 'rewards', 'performance goals' and 'punishments' is therefore deeply entrenched in teachers' assessment practices and in their feedback to students (see also Gipps and Tunstall, 1995). This tradition is exacerbated by pressures on teachers to get as many pupils as possible through external tests whilst minimising the demotivation of those who do not succeed. Yet, this may confirm low expectations of achievement and a narrow view of what constitutes 'purposeful' learning. Torrance and Pryor show, for example, that teachers 'protect' children they see as vulnerable from having to engage with robust feedback and its implications about their achievement. Similar pressures may also be evident in post-compulsory education if teachers want to maximise students' achievement in order to give them the best chance possible in difficult socio-economic circumstances. Yet, as Elliott et al argue, this cultural disposition can, inadvertently, reinforce low expectations of achievement (1999).

b. Creating an assessment community

Notwithstanding contradictory theories of learning, and conflicting pressures on assessment practices, effective formative assessment occurs in an 'assessment community', where students internalise what is implied by the formal 'standards', their existing performance and their final goal (Gipps, 1994). The need to make assessment communities effective has implications both for the quality and use of feedback, and also for the quality of relationship between teachers and students. However, research by Tunstall and Gipps (1996) and Torrance and Pryor (1998) shows that the nuances of feedback are subtle. For example, reinforcement such as excessive praise, or feedback that focuses learners' attention on self-esteem and away from improving their performance, detract from effort and can reinforce attributions of achievement to ability (see also Newton, 2000). Elliott et al (1999) argue that the most effective teachers actually praise less than the average (see also, Black and Wiliam, 1998a).

The idea of internalising a standard also has both behaviourist and constructivist dimensions. An early aim in GNVQs was that precise specifications of outcomes could create shared understandings of the required standard amongst teachers and between teachers and students. Yet, an assessment community requires induction and socialisation, where reinterpretations of 'standards' occur through moderation processes, and discussion between colleagues about the quality of grading and comments to students (Wolf, 1995; Winter and Maisch, 1996; Ecclestone, in press). This has parallels with moves to develop self and peer assessment amongst students as strategies for encouraging this shared standard.

'Checking compliance' or 'encouraging critical conversations' therefore seems to summarise the tension in creating an assessment community. A heartfelt perspective is offered by Graham (1998) who argues that the pressures of summative assessment

destroy the type of authentic relationships between teachers and students that can allow learning to be real and empathetic (see also Rogers, 1983).

There is therefore a need to examine the social dynamics of assessment relationships since internalising the standard of assessment implies much more than merely knowing what it is and then aiming for it. As Black and Wiliam argue:

beliefs about the goals of learning, about one's capacity to respond, about the risks involved in responding in various ways and about what learning should be like [all] affect the motivation to take action, the ability to choose action and commitment to it (1998a, p20-21).

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of 'habitus', Hodkinson and Sparkes argue that career decisions *"can only be understood in terms of the life histories of those involved"* (1997, p33). It is therefore likely that attitudes to an assessment system, especially one which intends that students should engage actively with it, will be similarly affected by *"interaction with significant others and with the culture in which the subject has lived and is living"* (ibid, p33). Here the notion of 'culture' is apposite for an assessment community since it includes the 'maps of meanings' which make things intelligible to its members (Clarke, cited ibid, p33) and also external influences on responses, such as attitudes from family, peers and work colleagues.

'Habitus' links to ideas about 'situated cognition', where what is learned depends on interaction between conceptual structures (schemata) amassed through schooling and other experiences (Hodkinson and Sparkes, op cit.). In assessment communities, social and conditioned dispositions affect students' views about whether questions and feedback are opportunities to learn, a potential threat to self-esteem, or an unfair hurdle. Groups and sub-cultures will also be important, perhaps affecting individuals' willingness and ability to develop different types of motivation and autonomy within a peer group. An important factor in these social dimensions is that informal learning and non-formal learning are both significant and overlooked (Eraut, 1999). In a context where teacher

and student contact in colleges is no more than 15 hours a week for a full-time course, there are many more opportunities for informal and non-formal learning than for formal learning. These create their own norms, 'maps of meanings' and dispositions.

3. MOTIVATION AND AUTONOMY IN GNVQs

a. The GNVQ assessment specifications⁶

As Chapter One showed, claims for motivation and autonomy developed through the OBA system of GNVQs have not been well articulated nor substantiated empirically. In the light of the theoretical typology discussed above, this section highlights some more precise meanings of autonomy that appear to underpin, albeit implicitly, the assessment specifications.

The 1993 –1995 Model reveals several notions of autonomy: the freedom of teachers and students to design their own courses around outcomes; the potential for all students to achieve Distinctions, provided they met the criteria; generic independent skills rewarded through grade criteria for planning assignments, assessing strengths and weaknesses in managing work and evaluating improvements; evidence of achievement across the programme accumulated in individually constructed portfolios. At Distinction level, independence also encouraged students to meet criteria without direct guidance. Other criteria like 'complex sources' and 'range of sources' also indicated a deeper interpretation of independence.

Advice to teachers placed 'information for students to plan their learning at the next stage' at the top of a list of functions for summative evidence (Jessup, 1994, p12). It emphasised regular, consistent feedback to students about their progress as essential for their motivation and the ability to plan their programme. In contrast to widespread anecdotal evidence amongst teachers that they 'are not allowed' to help, advice also points out:

But this does not mean they never ask for help - independent students will often ask questions based on their own initiative and information. A dependent student does not take initiatives, needs ideas and options given to them and needs advice about what to choose and why” (ibid, 1994).

The 1995 Model was used in all but 90 centres until September 2000. A ‘slimmed down’ version of the 1993 model reduced the grading criteria and the proportion of the portfolio required for summative assessment. However, there is significantly more detail in the actual specifications as ‘amplification’ and ‘evidence indicators’, accompanied by advice to teachers that students should experience ‘active learning’ and ‘have to make informed judgements about their learning’.

The 1996 model was introduced as a pilot of new specifications after an official review of the assessment model was commissioned in 1995 by the NCVQ and chaired by John Capey, principal of Exeter college and a member of the NCVQ Council. The review and subsequent pilot in 90 centres responded to widespread criticisms of an overburdened, confusing model and Advanced level students’ lack of ‘cognitive depth’ within a subject⁷.

The ‘Capey’ model is the basis for ‘Vocational A-levels’ in September 2000. Instead of generic grading themes, criteria of planning, review and evaluation are embedded within subject (unit) specifications. There is more emphasis on externally-set and moderated assignments. Pass criteria emphasise procedures: selecting material and deciding on a focus for the study, with verbs of ‘explain’, ‘identify’ and ‘describe’ indicating the lower levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives (1956). To progress from Pass to Distinction, there is a pattern in all units of adding criteria of ‘synthesis’ and ‘comprehension’, then ‘analysis’, ‘critical analysis’ and ‘evaluation’. To gain a Merit, students need to meet all Pass criteria, and then the Merit ones. For Distinction, students have to meet all Pass and Merit criteria and then ‘critically evaluate’ or ‘critically

⁶ Appendix 5 offers an overview of key characteristics in each model.

⁷ The political impact of both the review and criticism of GNVQs is analysed in Chapter Six.

analyse' either the learning processes used in an assignment or issues raised by the subject content, such as the application of a particular theory or procedure to a context or practice:

Higher grades build on achievement at lower grades. This does not mean that the students have to do additional tasks to get a merit or distinction grade. It means that they show increased sophistication and independence in their work, for example in the planning and organisation of their work, and their production of better-quality work which shows a deeper understanding of what they have learnt. Independence is therefore subject related rather than seen as a generic skill across the course (NCVQ, 1997, p19)

A major change is therefore to locate implicit notions of procedural, personal and critical autonomy within specific subject criteria instead of generic, 'transferable' skills across the course as in the 1993 and 1995 models. Examination of specifications in fieldwork for this study shows that implicit notions of autonomy for Distinction grades are, potentially, sophisticated but confusing (see Appendix 5). Variation appears, for example, in whether units emphasise cognitive skills, application of theory to practice, command of theory or generic independence, such as planning, managing and evaluating one's own work. 'Evaluation' might emphasise personal strengths and weaknesses in an assignment, or the applicability of particular theories or approaches to research. For example, the Social Policy unit in Advanced Health and Social Care (HSC) requires students to explore ideology in social issues. In contrast, the set assignment for 'Planning a Health Campaign' seems to encourage the 'hunting and gathering of information' that school students in Bates' study showed (Bates, 1998a) and fairly superficial evaluations of these processes in order to gain a Distinction.

In spite of aims in the 1993 and 1995 models that formative and summative assessment were iterative, current official guidance to teachers is vague about the role of feedback. Guidance focuses on boundaries of 'acceptable' help, summative evidence and how to reduce the administrative burden of recording (QCA, 1998). The QCA's Code of Practice governing assessment procedures for teachers and awarding body verifiers also discusses 'internal assessment' (coursework) entirely in summative terms. Similarly,

advice to students in unit specifications concentrates on what summative evidence will be required, how it will be recorded and where it could derive from.

The 2000 model draws mainly from the 1996 Capey model and renames GNVQs as ‘vocational A levels’. The new model has adopted many A-level characteristics, including grading at five levels and the replacement of portfolio assessment by external testing in two units.

There is therefore a major shift from principles underpinning ideas about autonomy and motivation in the first model:

- from content-free specifications based on outcomes to a syllabus
- from 100% mastery of outcomes to sampling parts of the syllabus and isolated grade criteria rather than cumulative achievement
- from continuous assessment plus knowledge-based tests to more robust external testing and assignments designed by QCA and awarding bodies
- from creative activities and ‘real life’ assignments to a more hypothetical application of theory to pre-defined contexts and scenarios
- from generic skills of independence to subject-focused autonomy

The technical minutiae of each model, and the political debates that have accompanied them, are complicated. Yet, some understanding of them is important if researchers are to evaluate the impact of a particular assessment system on learners’ autonomy. Debates and criticism surrounding the model are analysed in Chapter Six.

4. DEVELOPING LEARNERS’ AUTONOMY AND MOTIVATION

This chapter has argued that, in the context of everyday implementation, guidance and assessment specifications in GNVQs imply vague types of autonomy and motivation. More generally, students’ autonomy is affected by external and self-determined motives,

their dispositions to learning and their expectations of achievement and progression within a local context.

Ideas about social capital and social motivation, discussed in Chapter Two and above, suggest potential commitment to a social or peer group and to good relationships within a learning programme. Ideally, this encourages learners to become full members of a community of practice, developing a new learning identity and constructing 'maps of meanings' together. Yet, communal loyalties which might spur such motivation may be precarious while an ideological context of risk consciousness highlights the consequences of poor motivation for participation in purposeful learning. New discourses arising from this might lead to negative labels of 'non-learners' or 'learners at risk' or 'hard to help' (see also Edwards, 1997). One effect may be to encourage low expectations amongst teachers and students' about the potential for *intrinsic* and *interested* motivation as characterised in the typology.

Commitment to an assessment community is, perhaps self-evidently, affected by students' reasons for being in education, and their responses to their particular assessment community. Shortage of good jobs, low expectations of progression or the value of education may create growing numbers of 'hangers on', 'pragmatic acceptors', 'drifters' and 'strategic compliers'. Pressures for credentialism, expectations of poor motivation, together with concerns about students' futures, could encourage teachers to adopt unchallenging forms of assessment that emphasise affective attributes or procedural autonomy and detach these concerns from wider issues (A.Hargreaves, 1989; Ball, 1990). Examination of the GNVQ assessment specifications shows that students are not required to relate their own development to a social context. In a modular system that fragments connections between ideas and different types of autonomy, critical autonomy is left to teachers' own commitments or insights.

Reinforcement of an introspective focus can also occur through the 'vast bureaucratic web[s]' associated with OBA which make teachers both "*agents of, and subject to, the disciplinary process of individual measurement and assessment*" (Edwards and Usher,

1994, p 11). Assessment might promise that students will learn more about themselves, whilst the minutiae of action planning, review and self-evaluation make them regulate their own behaviour in prescribed, atomised ways. If critical autonomy is limited, these problems can lead to a phenomenon of ‘starting where learners are...and leaving them there’ (Ecclestone, 1996b). GNVQs may therefore erode critical autonomy by steering attention away from ‘emancipation and practical issues towards the technical’ (Habermas cited by Bloomer, 1998).

Yet, personal and critical autonomy may also be affected by how far students see themselves as ‘embedded’ learners and able to exploit assessment feedback to improve learning and achievement, not just to get better grades. Learners may also be personally autonomous in their lives outside a learning programme but less disposed to develop it within one if motivation and prospects are poor. In addition, pressures on students to be instrumental about grades could make it difficult for teachers to motivate strategic compliers, and even embedded learners, to seek out the rigour or commitment that this requires.

At the same time, the demise of general education in the post-16 vocational curriculum, discussed in Chapter One, and the location of critical autonomy within subject commitments, makes it unclear how GNVQs teachers will view autonomy. The personal aims, values and pedagogic skills that individual teachers bring to their subject discipline are therefore likely to be crucial, but largely implicit, in their own commitments to, and interpretations of, critical autonomy.

Socio-cultural factors are also important. Learners’ previous ‘learning careers’, together with the socio-cultural dynamics of the GNVQ assessment system inside a particular community of practice, may produce certain feelings and responses in relation to assessment activities. The spectrum of constructs relating to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, discussed above, suggests that motivation is differentiated and fluctuates during a learning programme. In addition, social commitments to learning are likely to be shaped in particular ways by informal and formal learning activities, as well as by

factors discussed so far. Yet, such commitments may not necessarily be progressive: Field (1998) shows, for example, that groups can create their own norms about what counts as desirable learning and marginalise peers who do not conform.

In relation to the role of formative assessment in promoting autonomy and motivation, it seems that a prescriptive OBA model is unlikely to fuse formative and constructivist notions of assessment with summative outcomes, as its architect Gilbert Jessup intended. In addition to widespread lack of understanding amongst teachers about how it translates into constructivist models of learning and classroom interaction, the implications of using assessment formatively and diagnostically are still under-conceptualised (Sadler, 1998). At the same time, assessment is firmly associated with summative requirements so that activities associated with transformatory learning are not seen by many teachers as 'assessment', making it easy to overlook their potential. Strong messages of summative assessment and transmission are built into new guidance for GNVQ assessment models.

Despite these barriers, research discussed here suggests that teachers have to see formative assessment as a conscious strategy for changing learning rather than merely part of 'good' tutoring or teaching. This study explores barriers to this goal and may therefore illuminate ways in which ideas about constructivist assessment can be applied to FE contexts where the intensive human resource implications could be managed and where the diverse motivations and dispositions of post-16 students could be engaged.

Finally, lack of understanding about assessment and learning combines with difficulty in explicating those aspects of assessment we *do* know about in forms that teachers can adapt for their own practice. There has been very little research on formative assessment within everyday constraints in mainstream settings (Black and Wiliam, 1998a) and, it seems, none in FE. Research therefore needs to help teachers re-conceptualise, then practise, formative assessment in the context of everyday assessment activities (ibid.). In turn, any new approach has to take account of barriers created by resource constraints, students' motivation and their entrenched ways of working and learning, including opportunities for informal and non-formal learning.

SUMMARY

Chapters Two and Three show that assessment practices are 'enframed' by structures of schools and society. Learning is therefore situated within the social, technical and affective climates fostered in specific contexts. In this light, many teachers' assessment actions are as much about establishing discipline, routines and student satisfaction as developing new capacities and achievements (Black and Wiliam, op cit, p58).

This chapter has highlighted a need for assessment communities with a commitment to developing different forms of autonomy and motivation more precisely and strategically than is currently the case, using a combination of transmission, transaction and transformation. Empirical exploration of issues discussed here depends, in part at least, on an account of formative assessment in the 'black box' of everyday college classrooms and relationships. Research will need to examine how the aims and processes of formative assessment are seen by the actors involved and then affected by the peculiar dynamics of communities of practice within GNVQ groups.

An important aim for this study will be to establish how, or if, GNVQ assessment creates or contributes to 'learning (or perhaps 'assessment') careers'. This account hopes to bring an assessment system alive by presenting individuals' values, beliefs and aims for learning as authentically as possible in a unique institutional context, with a particular combination of staff and students. As Chapter Five shows, the fieldwork implies an immersion in the day-to-day life of a GNVQ programme in order to reveal diverse factors affecting expectations about motivation and autonomy and strategies to realise them.

Finally, in response to criticisms that GNVQs encourage impoverished forms of motivation, 'technical empowerment', and the 'hunting and gathering' of information associated in my typology with procedural autonomy, it will be important to draw out GNVQ-related and non-GNVQ factors in the fieldwork.

Figure 1: A Typology of Autonomy and Motivation

TYPE		PURPOSES/AIMS		NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE/LEARNING		SOURCE OF AUTHORITY		FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	
Procedural/ technical autonomy	External and introjected motivation, individual motivation	Procedures to meet requirements. - student/teacher views - specifications - awarding body guidance Meet aims within boundaries Begin to define aims <u>outside</u> boundaries Decide procedures to achieve aims		<i>Transmission</i> – teacher and/or test specifications Emphasis on quantity and replication of pre-defined knowledge combined with some <i>Transaction</i> between learner, teacher, texts and official guidance		<i>Teacher/government/institution</i> combined with some <i>Institutional and teacher autonomy</i> in designing assignments and activities for a local context <i>Students accountable</i> for meeting requirements		<i>External</i> assignments, tests, definitions of quality and standards combined with some <i>Teacher/student interpretation</i> of choices within boundaries Formative and summative checking and limited, depersonalised feedback based on checking gaps	
	Identified, intrinsic and some interested motivation, individual and some social motivation	Insights into procedural strengths and weaknesses in the course Reflection on broader strengths/weaknesses Awareness of options, interests, possibilities for progression. Self-management and self-direction (procedural and personal). Some awareness of wider context and moral dilemmas		<i>Transmission</i> but emphasis on <i>Transaction and negotiation</i> over external requirements, learning strategies, what counts as knowledge and evidence. Greater degree of negotiation about outcomes, aims, processes etc		<i>Students responsible</i> for own work within external boundaries Responsible for own learning and for setting targets <i>Peer commitment</i> to work of other learners		<i>External</i> standards but broader boundaries too <i>Portfolios</i> <i>Ipsative</i> assessment and some differentiated personalised feedback to individuals <i>Peer</i> assessment <i>Negotiation</i> of standard and evidence	

<p>Critical autonomy</p> <p>Intrinsic and interested motivation, social motivation</p>	<p>Ability for judgements about subject content and growing expertise in it</p> <p>Cognitive synthesis and evaluation</p> <p>Awareness of subject knowledge in a wider context</p> <p>Awareness of subject-related strengths and weaknesses</p> <p>Social commitments and sense of responsibility to a community (professional or social)</p>	<p><i>Transformation</i></p> <p>Knowledge is <i>dynamic</i>, changing and increasingly re-constructed by learner</p> <p>Knowing is <i>contextual</i></p> <p><i>Formal and informal</i> discourses in a community of learners (teacher/students/colleagues)</p> <p>Opportunities for <i>higher order</i> questioning and self-generated questions from students</p>	<p><i>Community</i> of learners where authority shifts from teacher</p> <p>Complexity, creativity and openness in learning content and processes</p> <p>Transmitted knowledge is genuinely open to critique</p> <p>Intrinsic standards of rationality and communication are both implicit and explicit but become more tacit as expertise grows</p>	<p>Combination of assessment but emphasis on self- and peer-assessment</p> <p><i>Negotiated external and ipsative</i> standards</p> <p><i>Internalisation</i> of what counts as external standard.</p> <p><i>'Critical conversation'</i> between teacher and learners and amongst peers.</p> <p>Robust questioning, debriefing and reviews of learning</p> <p>Individualised feedback</p>

CHAPTER FOUR

DEVELOPING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

INTRODUCTION

In writing this chapter, I now empathise strongly with an MA student who, when I failed her first assignment, protested that, as a working class, 'second chance' learner with no formal grounding in critical analysis, she should not be judged by the same criteria as 'traditional' students. I cannot make similar claims about critical analysis in my own conventional higher education but a PhD student's attempt to articulate a coherent epistemological rationale is hindered by not having any grounding in philosophy. Nonetheless, this caveat is not intended to be an excuse for avoiding the task! Instead, the anecdote illustrates two themes running through this Ph.D. First, opportunities to become critically autonomous are unequally distributed and promoted. Second, in the light of the typology discussed above, students cannot develop critical autonomy unless they have *intrinsic* and *interested* motives to meet criteria by which they will be judged and unless they value the community that is judging them. They must then engage with the implications of these commitments for improving their work. In my case, criteria for judging the quality of this study are partly accounted for by those stipulated for all Ph.Ds, but suggested also by goals of policy scholarship introduced in Chapter One.

In addition, a crisis of confidence about purposes and appropriate epistemology for educational research affects perceptions of criteria, particularly for judging qualitative studies. This has surfaced, in part, through criticisms of irrelevance, triviality, partisanship and bad quality (see Tooley and Darby, 1998; Hillage et al, 1998). These criticisms are reinforced by moral panics that create 'policy hysteria' and scapegoats and,

as a scapegoat themselves, researchers respond increasingly uncritically (Stronach, 1998). Further difficulties emerge from government's willingness to collaborate with academic researchers (Blunkett, 2000) in a climate which already champions 'relevance' and measurability in assessment systems, quality assurance, and research. It is therefore easy to label critical or theoretical research as irrelevant or biased, or as mere 'oppositional politics', making it possible that apparent *rapprochement* between academics and policy-makers could conceal new manoeuvres to control research more closely (Coffield, 1999c; Hammersley, 2000). In relation to epistemology, positivism in assessment systems (Broadfoot, 1999) contributes to a climate where phenomena that cannot be defined and measured become esoteric, abstract, even useless. In promoting OBA, for example, Stephen Steadman addresses his academic peers' objections by citing rhetorically the often heard cliché 'if it can't be measured, it isn't worth it', followed by the objection that 'if it can be measured, then *'it'* isn't it!'. In a dismissive flourish, he observes: "*if you won't measure it, you can't improve it, and if you won't improve it, you probably don't care*" (Steadman, 1995, p201). Underlying this simplistic argument are intractable debates about the nature of reality, the goals and limits of measurement.

This context obviously affects my own attempts to demonstrate that "*the [Ph.D] student understands the issues that lie behind the crises of representation and legitimation... gives adequate reasons for the position they adopt and shows a realisation of problems raised by their position*" (Hodkinson, 1998b, p3). Yet, defining values in order to demonstrate academic credibility and to show critics where differences lie are not easily amenable to explicit articulation since choices about which problems to explore, what methodology to use and how to interpret data all "*flip between intuition and discursive thought*" (Hodkinson, 1998c, p562). Somehow, then, Ph.D candidates must show credibility and competence, be open to a surfacing of tacit thinking whilst, at the same time, being reflexive about the realities of qualitative research. One final feature of a struggle to articulate an epistemology is the danger of mirroring a positivist trap reflected in OBA itself, namely what Richard Winter calls "*a bottomless pit of absolute precision where verbal distinctions proliferate without end*" (Winter 1993, p). There is a strong

sense that attempts to represent disagreements amongst researchers fall into a similar mire.

Section One extends the aims of policy scholarship introduced in Chapter One, and proposes an analytical framework to address them.

Section Two discusses the implications of the aims and analytical framework for epistemology.

Section Three outlines criteria for evaluating critical policy analysis arising from my aims and the analytical frameworks they suggest.

1. FRAMEWORKS FOR POLICY SCHOLARSHIP

a. The aims of policy scholarship

It seems possible to construct a compelling account of a policy initiative and its effects on practice without an explicit guiding ideology since many policy researchers are not reflexive about the values that inhere in their work (Ozga and Gerwitz, 1994, p122). This enables critics to allege that underlying partisanship leads to unsubstantiated assertions or particular interpretations that are not overtly justified (for example, Tooley and Darby, 1998, also Tooley, 1997). Sheila Riddell argues that:

the researcher should ensure that both her research design and reporting are reflexive, making explicit the way her political commitments have influenced both her selection of problems, her conduct of the research and her interpretation of data (1989, p92-93).

Initial aims for this study were represented by Ozga and Gerwitz (1994) who argue that research can: draw attention to, and challenge assumptions informing policy; expose the effects of policy in 'real life' implementation; explain how injustices and inequalities are reproduced and suggest strategies for social transformation. Critical research can also

counteract 'policy science' (Grace, 1994) and 'abstracted empiricism' (Wright Mills, 1970) which generate questions and analysis from an acceptance of prevailing social and political power relations and of conditions within institutions where these are enacted. Policy science considers particular problems in specialist areas of activity, isolated from broader structural conditions. Policy scholarship might also counter the rise of 'policy entrepreneurship' where researchers promote their own careers by reducing policy science to a proselytising of solutions that will turn practice into a mirror of policy intentions (Ball, 1995).

In contrast, policy scholarship takes a specific aspect of practice or policy as a focus but aims to understand processes of change within a much larger picture (Dale, 1994). Nevertheless, although the QCA and DfEE are more open to academic research, it is hardly surprising that policy-makers are not interested in the "*exposure of unjust consequences*" of policy nor in a more elaborate theory of the State and its role in education policy (Ozga and Gerwitz, op cit, p123). Criticism of irrelevance, bias and polemic, combined with tendencies towards policy science and policy entrepreneurship, may make these audiences increasingly impatient with research that does not contribute overtly to 'evidence-based' policy and practice. Specific dilemmas therefore arise from critical values, especially in the UK where policy-makers have a long tradition of nervousness about research which questions misplaced policy assumptions or is overly critical (Brown and Keep, 2000). Any lingering view that university researchers are 'heroic defenders of the people's right to know against the secrecy and evasiveness of the powerful' (Bridges, 1998, p602) has little resonance. Hammersley argues, pessimistically, that hoping for research to influence policy at all is unrealistic (1994).

Nevertheless, policy scholarship can pursue relatively uncontroversial reasons for exploring views amongst those inside policy-making processes. Walford (1994) defines such aims as:

- to 'people policy' with personalities, beliefs, values and dilemmas
- to gain data unavailable elsewhere

- to confirm or adjust existing publicly available accounts of policy
- to identify and understand networks of individuals and agencies.

Similarly, Fitz and Halpin (1994) argue that 'elite-based' research into education policy can:

- help us understand the nature of power and how policy-makers realise their aims
- show the shortcomings of policy from a position of better understanding
- help us understand the networks of individuals and agencies and their relative influence
- clarify, confirm or adjust existing accounts of policy formulation
- familiarise researchers (and I would add 'practitioners') with the assumptive worlds of policy-makers and key actors who set policies in motion.

My own aims for the policy analysis in this study encompass those listed above. As Chapters Two and Three show, I hope to explore how policy processes, and the competing ideologies that underpin assessment policy, affect specific pedagogic constructs of autonomy and motivation, both through assessment practices and the social relations of assessment communities in GNVQs. Nonetheless, such aims are defined by me and the teachers and students in the study are involved in meeting them rather than defining their own. This raises issues of how far research really involves participants, let alone be 'emancipatory' (see, for example, Jordan and Yeomans, 1995). It is therefore important to articulate how policy-based research will be useful, not only to those who take part in a study, but also to a wider audience of teachers, policy-makers and advisers, curriculum managers, and especially students.

Precision about aims and audiences also helps researchers define more carefully what they mean by 'policy'. Although he later acknowledges his own theoretical uncertainties about the conceptualisation of policy (1992, p15), Ball describes policies as being:

pre-eminently, statements about practice - the way things could or should be - which rest upon, derive from, statements about the world - about the way things are. They are intended to bring about individual solutions to diagnosed problems. (Ball, 1990, p22).

Understanding conflict and coherence in policy evolution therefore requires analysis of how policies reflect and arise from broader conflict over the underlying purposes of education and the practices that promote these.

In debating how such analysis is possible, Roger Dale (1994) differentiates between the '*politics of education*' as the broader 'agenda' for education, created through particular processes and structures, and '*education politics*' as processes which translate this agenda into problems for institutions to respond to (1994, p35). He argues that a focus on education politics makes little sense unless there is "*more or less explicit reference to, and appreciation of, the politics of education*" (ibid). He criticises the tendency in educational research to deal with this by presenting features, such as the 'New Right' or 'the decline of the Welfare state', simplistically, a criticism echoed by Tooley and Darby (1998). The corresponding injunction, that policy analysts must either deconstruct these broad descriptions or avoid using them uncritically, counters a tendency to use them as shorthand or as simplistic rhetoric.

Aims outlined here, and the distinctions they suggest for policy and practice, inform three approaches used in this study to define the research questions and for analysis. I outline this below and then relate it to Malen and Knapp's multiple perspectives (1997).

b. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Ranson (1995) summarises three broad approaches to policy analysis:

- **a structural analysis** of the ways in which economy, education and the needs of capitalism relate to each other

- **an interactionist analysis** of how different groups, individuals and interests interact, both within policy processes and through advocacy groups, dissemination processes and ‘epistemic communities’ that contribute information and ideas to policy-makers (also Hulme, 1998)
- **a discursive analysis** of ideology and symbolism in both political conceptualisation, formation and transmission.

Ranson sees an eclectic approach as necessary, while Troyna (1994) sees eclecticism as problematic. My own study aims for eclecticism, partly for a broad basis for research training through a Ph.D, and partly because policy and practice seem difficult to encapsulate otherwise.

Structural analysis

Conditions discussed in Chapter Two contextualise an analysis that aims to relate the micro-politics of pedagogy and the reshaping of educational constructs, such as autonomy and motivation, to a wider exploration of new forms of influence in education policy. The study does not develop an underpinning theory of ‘the State’ or to define it anew although there are profound disagreements about whether the ‘big picture’ of structural analysis can be related convincingly to micro and meso level analysis and the detail of educational practices (Dale, 1995; Power, 1995). Instead, this study aims to contribute insights about power and influence in policy design and implementation, curriculum design and effect in the particular context of GNVQs

Structural analysis, combined with a political and organisational account of a particular initiative, can trace problems to their antecedents and to general *ad hocery* and confusion in education policy. A relevant example is an account of the NCVQ (Raggatt and Williams, 1999). It reviews different types of policy analysis, arguing that analyses which highlight the goals and actions of key officials, or the influence of interest groups such as employers, over-emphasise notions of agency. Instead, “*policy outcomes are to a*

large degree a function of the institutional formations and relations characteristic of the superstructure in any given society" (Williams 1998, p7). From this perspective, the fate of a policy is largely an expression of prevailing structural conditions. In the case of NVQs, unforeseen effects of mass unemployment channelled them into government training programmes where they acquired a low status image. The closing of the MSC in 1988 removed essential political support for NVQs as a high status route for work-based training and NCVQ's vulnerability as an organisation competing for funding and influence led to different aims for NVQs from those their designers intended. This suggests clear precedents for GNVQ developments discussed in Chapter Six.

From a different perspective, ethnographic studies by Inge Bates explore how competence-based training programmes socialise young people in particular ways within the specific relationships created by new forms of training and their structural context:

vocational training is not suspended in a socio-political vacuum but can be seen as one arena in which the State attempts to intervene in processes of labour supply...situated at the interface of individual identity and occupational structures, it is swarming with social processes...(Bates, 1991, p240).

A strength of Bates' work is that she moves fluidly between micro, meso and macro level issues, thereby illuminating the connections between national policy, institutional responses and individual identity and social actions in classrooms (see Bates 1991; Bates and Dutson 1993).

Interactionist analysis

Injunctions to locate policy in a wider political, historical and structural context are clearly not sufficient and analyses have limited value when they merely 'read off' education politics from macro-level changes (Dale, 1994). Instead, it is important to relate structural factors to political and organisational perspectives, competing interests and the effects of decisions made in different parts of the policy making process on

individuals and organisations¹. It is therefore possible to map a chronology and the competition for influence amongst government agencies, together with value conflicts, rivalries, alliances and the effects of particular individuals. Interactionist analysis may explain how and why certain parts of policy making gain influence, or become expendable at various times, making it possible to tracking different epistemic communities and advocacy groups and the specialist knowledge which influences 'policy oriented learning' amongst key actors. This can help reveal old, new and borrowed aspects of policy as well as competing tensions (Hulme, 1998).

Interactionist analysis can focus on what Ball (1994a) calls 'policy as text', the representation of policy encoded in complex ways through the struggles, compromises and public interpretations of intentions. Texts are decoded through implementation and new actors' interpretations. As Ball points out, attempts to present policy spread confusion as various mediators of policy try to relate their understandings of policy to particular contexts. It is therefore crucial to recognise that texts are not:

clear or closed or complete[but] the products of compromises at various stages (at points of initial influence, in the micropolitics of legislative formation, in the parliamentary process and in the politics and micropolitics of interest group articulation.).". (1994a, p16).

GNVQs have generated a deluge of texts: draft and final assessment specifications; guidelines to specification writers; guidance from NCVQ and QCA and awarding bodies to teachers; guidelines to awarding body officers; revised assessment specifications; decisions and debates recorded in minutes of policy meetings; commercial text books; guidance from agencies supporting policy development, such as the FEDA. These texts can all be seen as:

cannibalised products of multiple (but circumscribed) influences and agendas. There is ad hocery, negotiation and serendipity within the state, within the policy formulation process (Ball, 1994a, p16).

¹ Relevant accounts are those of the NCVQ (Raggatt and Williams 1999); the TVEI (Dale et al, 1989); the CPVE (Radnor et al, 1989); GNVQs (Yeomans, 1998a).

In addition, diverse end-users, such as awarding body assessment designers and verifiers, OFSTED and FEFC inspectors, staff in the FEDA support programme, teachers and students, parents and employers, create and amend the assessment specifications and offer competing interpretations of policy aims. This makes it important to understand how individuals' values and beliefs, their personal and professional experiences and the particular institutional context they operate in affect their particular contributions to texts (Bates, 1989) and Bourdieu's theory of 'habitus' could be a relevant dimension to analysis of policy and college-based data². The need to chart how organisations and individuals interact to produce texts is also important.

An aim in the study is to unravel how policy processes generated assessment specifications in two Advanced level subjects for the 1993 model (revised in 1995) and the 1996 pilot model, and then to evaluate how teachers and students use them. Exploration of 'texts' can therefore reveal the influences and agendas viewed as legitimate both inside policy processes and within institutions. It also reveals how these change over time as key actors move on or are removed and as the broader priorities of the State change. Charting how particular texts evolved is therefore a precursor to understanding how teachers and students interpret their intentions and turn them into "*interactive and sustainable practices*" (Ball, 1994, p19).

Discourse analysis

Seeing 'policy as text' provides a researcher and her readers with "*plenty of social agency and social intentionality*" (ibid, p21), and good stories about rivalry, intrigue and career-making inside policy, and perhaps even in colleges! Nevertheless, this could produce an over-rational analysis or over-emphasise individuals' accounts. It might be possible, for example, to show diverse influences on policy-based interpretations of autonomy and motivation in assessment systems and how teachers and students construct other

² However, this thesis cannot do analytical justice to Bourdieu's theory of habitus: as Nash (1999) shows, this requires rigorous explication and application. There is not space in the study for this depth, although it could provide a basis for further use of this data.

meanings. Such analysis could show how organisational and individual 'mind sets' comprise norms, values and attitudes, external influences and discourses. Again, 'habitus' could be a relevant dimension. My intention, however, is to illuminate aspects of what Bell and Raffe (1991) call the different 'normative' worlds of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners.

It is therefore important to focus on what people do not say, as well as on what they espouse. Drawing on Foucault's notion of 'systems of truth', Ball suggests that individual policies and collections of policies produce 'truth' and 'knowledge' fused together as discourses. For example, different meanings and values will underpin espoused aims of enhancing student autonomy and motivation through assessment. Discourses therefore construct and legitimise certain possibilities for thinking whilst tacitly excluding others, so that *"we may only be able to conceive of the possibility of response through the language, concepts and vocabulary the discourse makes available to us.."* (Ball, 1994a, p23). Analysis of how different actors account for their actions, or for those of others, reveals how discourses are more than the language and speech people use and what these reveal about underlying values, beliefs and experiences. In a Foucauldian sense, *"we do not speak a discourse, it speaks us...we are spoken by policies, we take up positions constructed for us within policies"* (ibid, p22). Discourse analysis illuminates the ways in which possibilities for thinking are constructed for, and by, teachers and students and diverse constituencies involved in designing and evaluating the GNVQ assessment system. Such analysis can also reveal the different importance attached to the 'legitimate' definers and solvers of problems and to other voices and discourses.

In a broader socio-political context, seeing 'policy as discourse' shows how particular types of knowledge are applied to perceived problems. In the case of this study, stated problems are students' motivation, the need for 'human capital', autonomous learners and parity of esteem between qualifications. Underlying these are espoused political problems of declining resources and related problems of accountability and quality

assurance. Struggles over how policies are enacted and interpreted to solve particular problems are already set within these discursive frames.

c. Multiple perspectives

As Malen and Knapp point out, disparities between the stated aims of an initiative and its actual effects seem to defy explanation partly because the social conditions which a policy tries to address are *"tangled webs of problems with symptoms, sources and 'solutions' that are neither readily apparent nor reliably addressed by policy provisions"* (1997, p419). Policy therefore takes a myriad of forms, has multiple functions and has many effects, some of which are unforeseen and unintended.

For a researcher trying to construct an analytical model, there are no 'grand theories' of education policy (Malen and Knapp, op cit) and many studies focus on one initiative but produce few conclusive findings or imply contradictory effects on practice. A narrow focus can overlook other effects and confirm policy-makers' assumptions that gaps between policy and practice reflect failures in implementation. Studies may claim that policy is so powerful that it is (variously) constraining, harmful and autocratic or empowering, transforming and innovative! Conversely, policy can be portrayed as so easily sabotaged, undermined or ignored by teachers that it becomes submerged into the normative worlds of institutions and individuals (ibid) Multiple perspectives therefore:

address key dimensions of policy; they encourage a comparative analysis of prominent perspectives in terms of their capacity to account for patterns of policy activity within and across settings; and they suggest 'avenues for influence', notably targets and strategies actors might consider should they seek to affect policy developments" (ibid, p421).

The conceptual map they outline is therefore a 'primitive tool and not an elegant theory' to reveal how discrepancies between the promises of policy and the patterns of practice might be constructed. Analytical categories emphasise: *policy ends and means*;

assumptions, perceived problems and values amongst policy-based actors and within policy making processes; strategies for influencing policy. Malen and Knapp argue that, taken together, these dimensions "*direct attention to what policy is supposed to accomplish, how it is formulated and whether it attains results commensurate with its intents*" (ibid p420).

Different perspectives illuminate these dimensions, summarised from Malen and Knapp:

A **rational** perspective presents policy as a solution to perceived, rationally debated problems, resolved through linear, discernible processes, set rules and procedures and based on research evidence. Policy is both an impetus and a solution. A rational perspective could emerge through different actors' perceptions of a chronology of events, injunctions for practice, processes to be followed. Following discussion of colleges in Chapter Two, and positivist assessment in Chapter Three, this rational account is likely to be imbued with an instrumental, 'technical rationality' which emphasises the effects on assessment activities of conforming to, or ignoring, these processes and of problems with using the model. Since this study focuses on an assessment system based upon technical rationality, I have added the sub-category of **technical** to the rational perspective. This emphasises the 'technology' of the model and problems in refining it.

An **organisational** perspective emphasises how organisations try to survive the ramifications of problems elsewhere in the system as part of a struggle to preserve particular organisational cultures and values and their position in the system. Policy is a response rather than an impetus. In colleges, an organisational perspective could emerge from departmental and institutional responses to change, the culture and ethos of particular course teams, inspection or awarding body procedures (see Chapter Five). I have added a sub-category, namely a **personal** perspective where policy is portrayed as the actions of a significant individual.

A **political** perspective views policy as a vehicle for affirming the system's legitimacy through regulating conflict over the distribution of scarce resources. Policy is not a

condition to solve, or a threat to avert, but a continuous dispute to mediate. The relative power of different players fuels, forms and reforms policy, making policy a settlement which mirrors the unequal power and diverse interests of key actors. Actors are not unitary or organisationally defined but members of shifting coalitions. A political perspective could also emerge from the ways that teachers experience tensions in values and beliefs in a context of scarce resources, and through the way they see their power in relation to other groups involved in the GNVQ.

A **symbolic** perspective casts policy as imagery and explores the meanings ascribed to or created by policy. Policy shapes conceptions of problems, and responses to them, and policy-makers communicate and interpret policy through particular discourses and rhetoric.

A **normative** perspective adds to those above whilst cutting through them to promote and protect particular values and confirm perceptions of a 'good' society. Normative perspectives unveil how policy affirms, advances, neglects or alters conceptions about values and goals. Policy problems are not therefore technical matters, organisational tensions or power contests but difficult manifestations of value tensions and dilemmas. For policy-makers and teachers, a normative perspective is likely to emerge through values and beliefs about the purposes of learning, assessment, autonomy and motivation.

Each perspective can be deployed individually, but combining all five enables analysts to probe policy developments in different organisational contexts. This directs attention to different elements of a policy-practice story and illuminates the main events and debates from alternative viewpoints. Although this approach does not produce a comprehensive, unified theory of public policy, it can:

encourage the construction of rich, comparative accounts of policy and its relationship to practice that are essential elements of efforts to sharpen theory and inform action (Malen and Knapp, 1997, p439).

It therefore helps analysts and actors to take closer looks at larger pieces of an education policy puzzle and think more clearly about them. At an early stage of the Ph.D, the outline above helped shape some of the policy-based questions and provided a preliminary basis for beginning to generate analytical categories for the policy-based and college-based fieldwork.

Yet, as Malen and Knapp also point out, there are drawbacks. The map they set out *"does little to advance the debate about the relative power of particular perspectives as explanatory devices"* (ibid, p438). And the approach is unwieldy: however the perspectives are used, they expand the analytical task. Some perspectives will be more compelling than others (ibid, p440), and act also as a constraining influence, leading to a danger of selective interpretation of evidence and analysis.

In addition, this approach may reflect the tendency towards proliferation of categories and associated criteria which is a feature of positivist epistemologies (see Section Two). As Malen and Knapp acknowledge, this *"sidesteps the tough conceptual labour "* required to develop more refined theories by licensing a maze of maps that are increasingly difficult to manage: like OBA systems, it is tempting to include everything!

2. EPISTEMOLOGICAL AIMS AND DILEMMAS

a. Positivism, neo-realism and post-modernism³

Aims for this study are strongly 'modernist' in tone, with initially tacit, naive assumptions that researchers can represent 'reality' authentically to various audiences and thereby argue rationally for change. Nonetheless, my research does not seek generalisable findings or a positivist methodology. Nor does it evaluate the effectiveness of the GNVQ

³ There is not space in here to debate the complexity of 'postmodernist' perspectives or the debates they create in educational research (see Edwards and Usher, 1996; Carr, 1999; Hodgkinson, 1998 for the discussion I have drawn upon here). However, I recognise the common tendency, particularly for critics, to use 'postmodernism' as a 'catch all' for diverse perspectives. Following Richard Bailey, I use it here as *"a generic descriptor [not to] imply a unanimity of view but rather as a shorthand for a style of theorising common to a cluster of viewpoints"* (1999, p91).

assessment model, or teachers' assessment practices, against measurable criteria relating to autonomy and motivation . Whether designing an assessment model or a research project, a positivist approach offers no means of effective practical change other than more refined technical control (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p103): at the outset, I recognised that I would not generate causal explanations to control the situation more effectively. Nor were positivist measures of reliability as generalisable results, and validity as authentic, precise measures of 'what is', applicable.

However, although parts of the study relate to an interpretivist tradition, I did not intend to explore participants' constructions about autonomy, motivation and assessment merely to reflect these back to them. Instead, structural dimensions can help to explain patterns in different constructions of reality amongst participants (Riddell, 1989). These early decisions show how choices about aims, methodology and emerging theories arise because *"most researchers are drawn to one possibility over the others, not necessarily consciously, but drawn nevertheless"* (Smith cited by Hodkinson, 1998b, p562).

Aims for this study draw from debates in policy scholarship about correspondence between the needs of capital, the role of the education system in reproducing these, and the nature of 'agency'. These debates have been disrupted by post-structuralist questions about whether notions such as rational truth, emancipation, progress and the existence of an external reality and the 'autonomous subject' have any validity, or even a moral basis. This challenge extends to 'emancipatory', 'critical' or 'participatory' research where articulating critical values can denote intellectual arrogance and an imposition of researchers' values on participants. Recent debates show that one outcome of this dilemma is no role at all for professional researchers who do not come from oppressed or marginalised groups (see, for example, Riddell et al, 1998; Dyson, 1998), or, taken to extremes, for no research to be done at all! There are therefore strict limitations to the idea that researchers are a neutral, objective element in the research, whose presence is somehow liberating or benign for participants at best, or unobtrusive at worst.

Further dilemmas arise over the impact of research. Avis (1997) argues, for example, that researchers with 'Leftist principles' must intensify arguments with practitioners over deeper inequalities masked by education. Yet, this can 'patronise' participants or promote an unsettling reflection amongst them whilst researchers depart to write a self-absorbing critique. Another dimension appeared in an early comment on this study by a close friend and principal of an FE college, that if teachers knew, through "*people like you*", how chaotic and *ad hoc* policy is, it would undermine morale in struggling to implement GNVQs since teachers need to think they are being improved. At one level, this is a not-so-subtle variation on 'ignorance is bliss'. It tempers any closet utopianism associated with modernist notions like 'knowledge is power' or 'truth will set you free'. It also raises a question asked by Black (1995) and Coffield (1999c) about how researchers should 'speak truth to power' constructively but robustly, but also to practitioners. More pragmatically, FE teachers are accustomed to FEFC, FEDA and QCA approaches to GNVQ evaluation and may expect quick, technical answers from the study.⁴ The policy and practice aspects of my study raise questions about 'researcher effects', relationships with participants and effects of research findings. These are addressed in the analysis of fieldwork (chapters six, seven and eight) and evaluated in the final chapter.

Other problems arise from defining criteria to evaluate qualitative research. As Garrett and Hodkinson (1998) point out, numerous researchers try to soften realist criteria by finding acceptable definitions of 'reliability' and 'validity'. Yin, for example, defines reliability as another researcher following the same procedures, conducting the same case study, arriving at the same findings and validity as 'true' data (Yin, cited by Robson, 1993). Addressing criticism that there is no correspondence between reality and our representations of it, Martin Hammersley agrees that universal criteria for qualitative research are not possible. Nonetheless, he maintains that validity as 'plausability' and 'credibility' connects researchers' discussions of situations and issues with the experience of particular audiences (Hammersley, 1998). Similarly, Michael Bassey (1995) aims to

⁴ After exploring approaches to research, and differences between 'policy scholarship', 'policy science' and 'policy entrepreneurship', an MA student in a module on assessment decided that 'policy entrepreneurship' was the most appropriate for her dissertation so that, as a GNVQ co-ordinator, she could 'sell' the answers to her colleagues.

reconcile hard-edged positivist notions of reliability with 'relatability' of findings and interpretations by readers from real-life contexts. June Scofield (1993) discusses why many qualitative researchers reject reliability as generalisability but maintains that careful choice of a 'typical' site, combined with rich description, enables other readers to relate findings from one study to another.

From certain perspectives, it is the researcher's own values, bias and inefficiencies which undermine reliability and validity (see Robson, 1993). A form of socially scientific 'self consciousness' makes values, methods and assumptions as transparent as possible, making "*the permeation of all aspects of the research with reflexivity ... essential... then issues of reliability and validity are served*" (Delamont, 1992, p9). Striving for reliability and validity, whilst recognising that humans are fallible, exerts a form of 'quality control' on the conduct and presentation of research (Robson, 1993). In addition, the Ph.D offers training in research, enhancing a professional commitment to the skills needed for qualitative research and combining this with reflexivity. This makes processes and data available for checking, perhaps by participants, but also by peers, external examiners and other audiences.

Yet, for Garrett and Hodkinson (1999), attempts to define 'reliability' make no sense at all while researchers who aim to soften 'validity' offer little more than 'subtle realism'. Such attempts are lingering notions of :

faithful and accurate representation [which] has more in common with an aspiration to discover external truths about the world than it does with acknowledging the socially constructed and fallible nature of knowledge" (Garrett and Hodkinson, 1999, p5).

To justify this argument, they show how attempts to reconcile conflicting epistemologies create their own spiralling specifications of criteria for validity, citing those suggested by Miles and Huberman:

- objectivity/confirmability of qualitative work
- reliability/dependability/auditability

- internal validity/credibility/authenticity
- external validity/transferability/fittingness

The impossibility of reconciling positivism with post-modernist attempts to displace and disrupt validity impels Garrett and Hodkinson to avoid the use of validity and to reject “*policing practices that divide good research from bad*” (Scheurich quoted by Garrett and Hodkinson, 1999, p4). Relativist and post-modernist perspectives disdain or ignore attempts to reconcile irreconcilable positions. Indeed, such attempts might merely be a passing nod to such debates without the necessary philosophical depth.⁵ Nor are postmodern theorists impressed with the idea of 'borrowing' post-modern deconstruction of discourses as techniques in a modernist cause (Stronach and Maclure, 1998).

Research discussed here reveals a convoluted debate where relativists accuse realists of being closet relativists and vice versa (see Hodkinson, 1998a). Hammersley (1998) argues that some academics ‘talk past each other’, generating misunderstandings from simplistic misuses of fundamental tenets like 'realism' or 'the search for truth'. In this, he concurs with Stronach’s allegations of ‘custard pie theorising’ (Stronach, 1998).

Nevertheless, Garrett and Hodkinson (1999) argue that differences can lock researchers within paradigms, producing arguments that criteria for research can only be defined in order to communicate with others in the same boat. This can lead to the ‘Balkanisation’ of education research where proliferating paradigms try to encompass an array of epistemologies (ibid). Despite this danger, if all knowledge is interpretation from a particular social, historical and personal standpoint, “*selection of criteria for making an interpretative judgement about research will partly depend on the standpoint from which the person making the judgement views the work*” (ibid, p6).

An ideology-free, third way seems to be on offer from conflicts outlined here. For example, in keeping with calls to accept relativism as the human condition, Smith (1998) and Garrett and Hodkinson (1999) use Gadamer’s ideas about hermeneutics to encourage

tolerance amongst researchers. This accepts uncertain links between constructions of reality and serendipitous engagement with ideas where researchers put their presuppositions up for constant scrutiny but without abandoning a quest for rational analysis and argument. Such struggle is endemic and *"is very unlikely to be replaced by a new 'sunlit plain' of entirely rational discussion based on universally agreed meanings"* (Garrett and Hodkinson, 1999, p14). Stronach (1998) disagrees that postmodernist deconstruction 'leads nowhere' and argues for emancipatory aims but without modernist utopianism (although he does not say what these aims are). Others hanker after emancipatory goals, tempered by scepticism about *"progress through reasoned reform or emancipation through revolution...on the grounds of their masking of the continuation of forms of oppression"* (Edwards and Usher, 1996, p209). For them, post-modernism's importance lies partly in showing that oppression, power and emancipation can be refigured in numerous ways.

Meanwhile, some researchers want to pull research back to a more pragmatic footing and to reassert the importance of rationality. Joanna Swann argues that:

any theorist who rejects the notion that objective knowledge of external reality is possible has taken a significant step towards idealism [where experience exists only in the mind] and, most likely, towards relativism (Swann, 1999, p17).

In her defence of realist research, she cites Popper to argue that *"a good deal of philosophical discussion... is irrelevant to the growth of knowledge (in the sense of problems, theories and arguments"* (ibid).

From this perspective, the investigation of educational problems, and the improvement of educational practice, are the only proper tasks for researchers (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Swann and Pratt, 1999). There is therefore frustration with tendencies in postmodernism and post-structuralism towards relativism that depicts social reality as mere individual

⁵ Some critics argue that education researchers are coming late to debates that have moved on in other branches of social science and that many embroiled in such debates do not recognise either their philosophical roots or that the questions are not new (David Carr, 1999).

constructions. Instead, Carr and Kemmis (1986) argue that interpretations of 'reality' cannot be divorced from people's material conditions, the effects of political and economic structures, or dimensions of status, power and professional roles.

Taking account of arguments that modernist and post-modernist positions cannot be reconciled, my own epistemology is defined by the aims outlined in Chapter One and extended in this chapter. Thus, although many postmodernists subvert notions of power, oppression and liberation to create a 'postmodernism of resistance' (see Hill et al, 1999; Edwards and Usher, 1996 for discussion), I see the low expectations of human agency, discussed in Chapter Two, as deeply implicated in accounts that depict the 'richly textured diversity' of human experience without attempts to relate it to structural conditions or to seek change⁶. Nonetheless, those who account for their reality through postmodernist deconstruction of identity and oppression are unlikely to see this, as ultimately I do, as a philosophy of fragmentation and pessimism. It seems that without structural analysis, even radical aims to deconstruct 'difference' can fragment into many manifestations of 'the Other' and, as Smith argues (1998), into individualistic introspection. Following Habermas, some researchers argue that introspection sabotages possibilities for collective communication or dialogue, let alone collective agreement, outside confined paradigms (Harkin, 1998).

Nonetheless, deconstruction of discourses and new ways of looking at power can enrich research committed to notions of 'social justice' and can, therefore, be deployed for other ends. Edwards and Usher argue:

we are still sufficiently modernist to hanker after education that can influence the pace and direction of social change, even though we no longer feel able to think of such change as constituting pre-defined purposes (Edwards and Usher, 1996, p212).

⁶ It seems that numerous academics committed to postmodernist theorising nevertheless use rational argument to persuade opponents about particular theses and often generalise from small-scale qualitative depictions of richly textured diversity to call for system-wide reform.

In spite of my attempts to avoid labels, my partisanship arises from an old 'grand narrative', namely that notions of rationality, shared understandings, knowledge and reflective practice might counter ignorance, habit, complacency, irrational policies and practices (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Such aims contrast with a postmodernist view that all human experience is linguistically bound, and that linguistic structures have no foundation in an external reality. This bleak view condemns the mind to assume the particular form of its own immediate location and community, where reality is a mere construction. Rather than pursuing a fruitless quest for reality, the wise person limits her aims to deconstructing the meanings of texts and discourses that face her. Such constraints do not seem tenable in light of my concerns in Chapter Two about a climate of risk aversion that reduces possibilities for thought and action to local and personal horizons. What Hill et al (1999) call the 'postmodernism of despair' fits this prognosis well.

Aims for this study then, are ultimately, modernist and pragmatic. They seek to reconcile an appreciation that historical materialism remains pivotal in shaping policy with a recognition that attributions of structural determinism and individual agency are often simplistic. This leads to my growing interest in how researchers use Bourdieu's notions of 'habitus' to explore people's responses to structural conditions and their own lives⁷. However, this chapter also acknowledges the precarious role of emancipatory aims for both education itself and research. This means that 'truth', 'reality' and 'rationality' are open to interpretation, where research accounts themselves construct reality. Pre-defined universalist criteria foist "*upon research artificial categories of judgement, preconceptions of what research should be and a framework of a priori conditions that it may be impossible or inappropriate to meet*" (Garrett and Hodkinson, 1999, p19). Although there may not be a such a list or framework, I must suggest my own criteria for judging the quality of this PhD.

⁷ As I revise this chapter for the last time, I see more clearly how Bourdieu's ideas could enhance the aims, theoretical perspectives and analysis of this thesis.

3. EVALUATING CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS

Aims outlined so far show that I wish my accounts to make sense to those involved, partly by attempting to explore ‘theories-in-use’ as opposed to ‘espoused theories’ (Argyris and Schon, 1974). Policy-based actors, teachers and students are important audiences and, although decisions about relevant criteria arise partly from the fieldwork and responses to analysis from participants, pragmatic criteria are ‘usefulness’, ‘interest’ and ‘new insights’ for participants. Carr and Kemmis suggest, for example, that ‘good’ research should “*educate, deepen insight and ...enliven commitment*” amongst teachers (1986, p93). However, caveats about limits to generalisable truths make it impossible for empirical data alone to offer ‘reliable’ interpretations that are measurable and replicable in other contexts. Nonetheless, reliability can be enhanced by triangulation and careful links to other studies, while validity can reflect practices and views in a ‘typical’ site. Taking account of the ways in which readers, participants and audiences construct their own meanings, this study adopts criteria such as:

- plausability
- relatability
- credibility
- authenticity
- reflexivity

In turn, these suggest particular methodologies:

- selecting a site and a sample to which external readers from constituencies represented in my study can relate and which are not atypical
- cross-verification of accounts and meanings through literature reviews and participant discussion of data and interpretations of data
- piloting and refining methods
- using different methods for generating data and evaluating them

- engaging constantly ⁸ with notes, literature and data as part of ‘illuminative evaluation’ (Parlett, 1981)
- tracking how research questions evolve
- refocusing at each phase of the fieldwork to respond to participants (Parlett, 1981)
- triangulation through discussion of preliminary analyses with different groups of participants, at different stages.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that “*there are many different kinds of data and one source cannot be used unproblematically to validate another source*” (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Ultimately, as Garrett and Hodkinson argue (1999), the audience for my research will reconstruct my ‘reality’ through their own.

Meanwhile, ethical dilemmas arise from the commitments which underpin my study, as part of a long-running debate in social science about ‘taking sides’ in research (see, for example, Avis, 1997; Troyna and Carrington, 1989). Concerns about the effects of policy initiatives on teachers and students means that, like many academics with these commitments, my empathy with policy-makers is more tenuous and fickle than it is with less powerful groups on the receiving end of their policies. This problem suggests the need for further criteria for judging how far I avoid ‘conceits’ amongst researchers suggested by Ball (1995; 1997), namely: golden ageism; presenting ‘mantric affirmations of belief’; being prey to unwitting stereotypes of practitioners, students and policy-based actors. I outline these briefly below.

A tendency towards golden ageism is an especially subtle trap for researchers concerned about initiatives that were considered at the start of the research to offer impoverished learning and assessment experiences. Indeed, critiques of State incursion through innovations such as TVEI (Dale et al, 1989), CPVE (Radnor et al, 1989), Records of Achievement (Hargreaves, 1986; 1989) show that these seem liberal and developmental compared to the over-regulated, narrow curricula that some critics (including myself) see as imposed now (see, for example, Bird et al, 1999). Yet this belief can lead to what Ball

⁸ However, this implies that piloting of methods is merely a preliminary way of refining them. Instead,

calls the implicit 'conceit' of golden ageism in policy research. He quotes Ellmore to argue that:

Education reform policy (and I would add education policy research - SJB) typically embodies three distinctive conceits: a) that the newest set of reform policies automatically take precedence over all previous policies under which the system has operated; b) that reform policies emanate from a single level and embody a single message about what schools should do differently; c) that reform policies should operate in more or less the same way in whatever settings they are implemented (Ellmore quoted by Ball 1997, p264-265).

The first two conceits can lead researchers to attribute impoverished curricula to faulty design and instrumental vocationalism rather than to structural factors such as the social context of young people's motivation, changes in colleges, the possible but tenuous effects of a 'risk consciousness' discussed in Chapter Two. Golden ageism can lead academics to take refuge in theory which:

provides comforting and apparently stable identities for beleaguered academics in an increasingly slippery world...Too often theory becomes no more than a mantric affirmation of belief rather than for exploration and for thinking otherwise. Such mantric uses of theories typically involve little more than a naming of spaces...The map simply needs to be coloured in rather than researched (Ball, 1995, p268)

Further difficulties arise when researchers unwittingly link ahistoricism and golden ageism. Ball (1997) argues that there is a dearth of policy research that takes Grace's 'policy scholarship' seriously, leading to a "*distinct tendency of post-88ism*" (ibid). In post-compulsory education, it might be argued that 'post-89ism' (the formation of the NCVQ) and 'post-93ism' (incorporation of colleges) are both evident.⁹ This might overlook significant continuities in policy, or contrast the best of 'before the watershed'

sharpening the research focus and finding better ways to gain and interpret data are continuous processes.

⁹ 'Post-2001ism' is likely to appear rapidly when the new Learning and Skills Council comes into being.

with the worst of the current situation and treat post-watershed policies as decisive, potent and influential and pre-watershed ones as more benign and suffused.

A related dilemma is to fall for stereotyped viewpoints (both tacit and explicit), affecting questions and interpretations of data. Research that focuses on the people and voices who inhabit policy texts and discourses can generate stereotypes. For example, it is tempting to see policy-makers, and other constituencies designing and evaluating GNVQs, as responsible for policies which induce the *"misery and broken dreams of practitioners"* (Ball, 1997). It is certainly tempting to see them as the instrumental, pragmatic, even cynical, 'policy entrepreneurs' and career-minded proselytisers of policy (Ball, 1995). It is therefore easy to depict policy as imposed on beleaguered teachers without consultation by remote, even authoritarian, government agencies. Other stereotypes can be read into this, where teachers are, variously, the 'heroic resisters', 'passive yielders', the 'strategic compliers', the 'passionate promoters', the 'stoical implementers' of policy.

Such factors might therefore engender ambivalent feelings between myself and some teachers in my study about GNVQ assessment policy and those responsible for it. Hostility to policy and its long-running 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 1990) about teachers can also lead critics to attribute 'new Right' ideology to everyone inside design and policy-making processes. This can obscure contradictory normative values between 'cultural restorationists', 'liberal marketeers' and 'vocational modernisers' (see Ball, 1990; Hickox and Moore, 1995; 1999). In turn, this overlooks the extent to which liberal humanist and vocational aims permeate initiatives like GNVQs, thereby attracting support from diverse educational standpoints.

These problems suggest three criteria for evaluating the conduct of methods, participation in discussion of data and subsequent analysis:

- insightful awareness of stereotypes implicit in relevant literature, interview preparation and in my own subsequent interpretation of data

- careful differentiation between the effects of GNVQ policy itself, and those created by other changes in colleges, curricula and funding and by teachers' interpretations and responses to policy
- rigorous self-assessment of my engagement with these criteria.

These underpin analysis of fieldwork and conclusions in the final chapter.

Lastly, the research question was initially to evaluate the impact of GNVQ assessment policy on students' motivation and autonomy. Addressing it demands a commitment to the firm, consistent practice of what Wright Mills calls the 'ethics of scholarship' and a commitment to developing a 'sociological imagination' (1970). I therefore need to add 'evidence of a sociological imagination' to criteria for evaluating the validity of this study. And I'll stop there to avoid a proliferating list: after all, a PhD is not a GNVQ!

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This study adopts an 'illuminative' approach advocated by Parlett (1981) who argues that an evaluation focuses and refocuses through the iterative treatment of design, sample construction, data collection, interim analysis and discussion with participants. I recognised early on that 'ethnography' is an approach difficult to both define and use (see Jordan and Yeomans, 1995) and, given the scope of the study as a whole, it did not seem feasible to do justice to a deep immersion in the everyday life of an assessment system. Nevertheless, I designed a case study based on 'illuminative evaluation', defining it as an *"intensive empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence"* (Parlett, 1981; Robson, 1993, p5).

This approach encourages complexity and enables research questions to evolve and become clearer over time. Combining analytical perspectives and methods can enrich interpretations of how a policy initiative affects practice and the values that underpin both dimensions. Developing a methodology and gaining insights into the ethical dilemmas it raises, requires iterative and linear, pre-planned and opportunistic approaches. These include: knowing some policy-based and college-based participants beforehand; literature review before, during and after the fieldwork; a pilot study; collecting data; parallel reflection on my own assessment activities with students; participant observation; interim analyses and discussion of emerging findings with teachers, students and some policy-based actors in my study.

This chapter outlines practical aspects and ethical dilemmas of using the research methods implied by the design and underlying aims.

Section One of this chapter considers construction of, and access to, the policy and practice-based samples of participants and discusses what might constitute a 'typical site' for the college fieldwork.

Section Two explores methods used in the research: focused interviews; post-observation interviews; participant observation; construct analysis; documentary analysis; student questionnaire; teacher questionnaire; participant discussion of emerging accounts and triangulation of evidence using all these methods.

Section Three discusses analytical approaches for exploring the data.

1. CONSTRUCTING A SAMPLE AND GAINING ACCESS

a. Policy-based sample

Informal links with two GNVQ designers had been established, one through my previous job in the FEU in 1992, and the other through a seminar on GNVQs at the British Educational Research Association conference in 1996. Both contacts were, and still are, committed to developing links between quango/ government-based research activities and academic researchers. Both have worked in universities, and both teach and supervise research students in addition to their current roles. One was involved in an earlier study on GNVQs (Ecclestone, 1998) and both had commented on the paper that arose from it. These two examples provided an early indication of how policy-based researchers individually relate to certain epistemic communities (Hulme, 1998).

Another invaluable contact was the ex-head of FEU, whom I worked for in 1992, and who was a member of the General Policy Committee (GPC) for GNVQs between 1992 and 1995. During the study, I am married to an inspector for FEFC who has led three national inspections of GNVQs, two with OFSTED, and attended GNVQ policy meetings at NCVQ/QCA from 1994 until 1999. These informal links proved crucial for gaining access to other key informants (see Walford, 1994). They also raise ethical problems

about professional and personal boundaries for these insights, making triangulation with other policy-based actors essential.

Early in the research, a meeting with the two NCVQ contacts identified key actors and focused on the research questions. The subsequent sample for policy-based fieldwork was both 'purposive' (Robson, 1993) as a sample from which one can learn the most, and 'opportunistic'. The latter characteristic relied on 'snowballing' where participants indicated other important actors to interview. A list of the sample is given in Appendix 8.

Limitations to positivist methodology discussed in the last chapter make it illogical to construct a sample carefully in order to predict similar results or to produce contrasting results for predictable reasons (Yin cited by Robson, 1993). Nonetheless, to be as immersed as possible in policy-based issues, I arranged interviews in order for different constituencies to be represented at similar times over an intensive period between March and June 1998. Twenty-three were covered in separate blocks of a few days each. However, 12 of the 25 interviewees (50%) were from the NCVQ and although there is no uniform 'NCVQ view' about GNVQ assessment, this set up an organisational bias. I hoped to offset this to some extent by concerted efforts to involve participants in commenting upon the emerging analysis, with particular reference to external constituencies.

My field notes reveal impressions about why access was relatively easy. First, the 'GNVQ story' had not been told from the perspective of its assessment policy although four interviewees had already been interviewed for a book about the history of the NCVQ (Raggatt and Williams, 1999). In addition, my request for access took place between January and February 1998, soon after the merger of SCAA and the NCVQ to form QCA (November 1997). Many NCVQ officials who had focused exclusively on GNVQs were moving into National Curriculum assessment and other research projects. The dissipation of NCVQ's organisational culture into new arrangements influenced strongly by National Curriculum and SCAA meant that access took place at a pivotal moment of change.

Some of those displaced from the NCVQ wanted to record their involvement with a policy to which many of them had been deeply committed.

This factor, and controversy over GNVQ assessment, means that, as Ball (1994b) argues, different actors had different motives for taking part: records to set straight, scores to settle, reputations to defend, contributions to be made public, and so on. Their motives will be partly known to them, and partly tacit. This also applies to representatives of external bodies in GNVQ developments, some of whom had also moved on or had been displaced in reorganisation. Similarly, as Ball also points out (*ibid*), my own motives were partly known to me but partly tacit, requiring reflexive scrutiny during fieldwork and analysis.

Second, vocational qualifications have a lower political status (see Edwards et al. 1997) and policy-makers in mainstream assessment policy were unfamiliar with the NCVQ (see Sharp, 1998). Researching GNVQs was not therefore a high profile study. I also gained access amidst political and organisational upheaval when some actors were at different turning points in their careers. The study might have been received differently once GNVQs had become well-established in the QCA and key actors had moved on.

Third, credibility was enhanced by the status of a PhD at Newcastle where other colleagues had recently researched GNVQs for the NCVQ (Edwards et al, 1997). A snowballing approach also showed that some actors, such as the three civil servants, valued academic research on GNVQs (for example, Alison Wolf's work and that of the post-14 research centre at Leeds). Conversely, interviewees in the NCVQ had been stung by Alan Smithers' attack on GNVQs and wanted a chance to provide a different account.

However, my field notes reveal another reading of 'credibility and status'. It is likely that a Ph.D thesis by a relatively unknown researcher, as opposed to a high profile, funded project is neither contentious or public since any controversial account might be assumed to gather dust in a university library! Ozga and Gerwitz add that being a female researcher with male policy-based actors can create the image of 'harmless gullibility'

(1994), although as Riddell argues, it is important not to collude knowingly with this stereotype (1989). It is important to recognise these dimensions to credibility because it can be tempting for researchers with critical values to conform to an image that the study will be irrelevant or harmless. In addition, as Whitty and Edwards (1994) point out, some policies generate such loyalty and hostility that policy-based actors doubt that research can be impartial. This makes it tempting to show during interviews that one is 'on the same side'; in Whitty and Edwards' work on City Technical Colleges, for example, many interviewees could not conceive that any 'like-minded' person could have reservations¹ (1994).

Fourth, notwithstanding conflicting interpretations of credibility, a snowballing approach facilitated access to those with high political or organisational status: some actors agreed once they knew someone else had either said they were 'essential' to the account or had been interviewed themselves. However, two of the 25 were more wary and there were hints of concern from them that I would 'triangulate our accounts against each other' (my notes), accompanied by the question of 'why do you need to see me if you've seen 'x'? However, no-one refused access and only two (civil servants) put explicit on/off the record boundaries on certain comments².

Gaining and maintaining access requires skills in written communication (particularly in outlining the aims, scope and use of the research), the interviews themselves and telephone contact. In addition, the sensitivity of some of the policy developments, and the controversy they generated, has meant strenuous attempts to offer a fair yet robust account of policy and to communicate with participants as the analysis emerges (see below).

¹ Useful advice was given by Tony Edwards: if asked directly why I was interested in GNVQ policy, an answer was 'because I'm fascinated by its intentions'. I used it on the two occasions when I was asked.

² This meant that negative feelings about certain individuals could not be presented, although it allowed me to interpret organisational and normative perspectives as suggested in Chapter Four.

b. Sites for study

An important aim in the study is to differentiate between 'GNVQ effects' and 'non-GNVQ effects'. I therefore minimised as many non-GNVQ factors as possible when considering variables in choosing the sites and constructing the student/teacher samples. I aimed to compare similar features whilst looking for disconfirming variables.

Figures for intake and achievement in GNVQs were given in Chapter One. One reason to focus on FE colleges and two subject areas was that two-thirds of Advanced GNVQs are taken in FE and 6th form colleges. In FE colleges, 70% of registrations are with EdExcel (formerly BTEC). These features are important variables since FE colleges have a longer tradition than schools or sixth form colleges of Advanced level vocational qualifications and, usually, larger and more disparate cohorts of students. Schools, colleges and 6th form colleges also vary in their links with particular awarding bodies: since each body has different assessment traditions, this factor exerts a strong influence over teachers' perceptions of the aims of different assessment systems (Ecclestone and Hall, 1999).

I focused on Advanced level because political aims for GNVQs began with a qualification that would gain parity of esteem with GCE A-levels. This focus also enabled an in-depth focus on autonomy and motivation amongst a particular cohort of students. I then selected the two most popular subjects, namely Health and Social Care (HSC) and Business because these were well-established as vocational areas before GNVQs. According to FEFC figures, 378 (of 450) FE colleges run Advanced Business GNVQ and 305 offer Health and Social Care, and these two subjects account for almost 50% of the total intake at Advanced level (FEFC, 1999; Wolf, 1997). Other GNVQ qualifications, such as Hospitality and Catering, Information Technology and Leisure and Tourism are new, hybrid subjects created for GNVQs from others in the vocational curriculum.

Analysis of GNVQs in colleges would therefore enable me to relate the effects of GNVQs to a specific political and organisational context and the new 'micro-

disciplinary' factors discussed in Chapter Two. Choosing HSC and Business meant that colleges had ten years experience of BTEC National Diploma before GNVQs replaced these in 1992. This reduced variables that might affect attitudes to GNVQ assessment, such as experience of different awarding body traditions or lack of familiarity with OBA. However, support for BTEC creates a different variable because BTEC was very public about its initial opposition to GNVQs (see Sharp, 1998), a stance supported at the time by many teachers. Nonetheless, focusing on four teams with experience of BTEC might imply more stable 'assessment communities' and would enable a reasonably valid evaluation of the effects of GNVQs on staff with a particular ethos. A more random variable arose because three courses of the four were piloting the new assessment specifications introduced after the Capey Review in 1996³. One team was still working with the specifications introduced in 1995, enabling me to contrast the effects of different GNVQ models. A focus on a particular assessment community also recognised that colleges deal with new, disparate cohorts each year whereas school teachers often know their Advanced GNVQ students who progress from Key Stage 4 or Intermediate GNVQ in a familiar environment.

A final factor in restricting the study to colleges and Advanced level programmes was that access was easier because of my familiarity and empathy with the culture, traditions and working practices of programmes at this level in FE. However, although familiarity might mean quicker routes to finding out how participants view their world (Delamont, 1992, p7), it could also lead me to overlook crucial changes since I left FE in 1991 (and particularly since incorporation in 1993). In addition, it might be easy to make assumptions based on my out-dated experience or over-empathy, or simply not see the taken-for-granted assumptions and practices of former colleagues.

I used Schofield's advice about choice of site, namely to look at 'what is, what may be and what could be' (1993). My study focused on 'what is' by trying to maximise typical and ordinary features of a site. At the same time, I hoped to find examples of good

³ Between 1996 and 2000, 90 centres covering schools and colleges piloted new specifications arising from the Capey Review of 1995, discussed in the policy analysis in Chapter Six.

practice in fostering autonomy and this meant being open to 'what could be'. The latter aim applies particularly to the student sample (see below). Yet choosing a 'typical' site was also problematic because of variation in student cohorts, different socio-economic contexts, urban and rural settings, league table positions and inspection grades. Choosing a typical site and sample is complicated further by the micro-politics of colleges that could only unfold during the research. Thus, features thought to be 'typical' might turn out to be atypical. This can be countered by searching for typicality but using 'thick description' to highlight atypical features (Schofield 1993).

I compared two urban colleges with reasonably sound inspection grades in the two chosen subject areas⁴. College A is the largest urban college in the northeast in a city of 260,000⁵. Despite some success in attracting new industries, unemployment in the city is high, with the fourth highest male unemployment rate of metropolitan districts. According to an FEFC inspection report, the college recruits an increasing proportion of students from local disadvantaged areas, although over half come from outside the city. In relation to recruitment of 16 year-olds, just over 31% gain grades A-C at GCSE in the city's schools, compared to a national average of 46%, with very few students from the city's nine independent schools. Courses at Advanced level (which includes A-levels and GNVQs) account for 41% of the intake and 11% of the full-time intake are 16-19 year olds (FEFC 1996b; 1999b). Higher education forms 7% of the college's provision. The proportion of 16 year-olds continuing in full-time post-16 education (schools, 6th form colleges and FE) in the city is 60%, compared to a national average of 69%.

College B is a merger of two former tertiary colleges in a city of 300,000. The loss of heavy industry has been only partly compensated by an influx of call centres and a large car manufacturer, making the university, health service and local authority the main employers. 52% of 16 year-olds continue in education, an increase of 60% since 1989,

⁴ FEFC grades curriculum areas for quality of teaching and learning, and for advice and guidance, using a 5-point grading scale from 5 (weaknesses far outweigh strengths) to 1 (no weaknesses). In inspections in 1995 and 1999, College B gained a 2 for Business and Health and Social Care. In 1996, College A gained a 3 for both courses and, in 1999, a 2 for Business (Health was not inspected).

⁵ I use pseudonyms later but 'Colleges A' and 'B' here in order to present contextual information anonymously.

while 30% participate in training schemes (twice the national average). Unlike College A, there is less competition with schools for 16 year-olds, but strong competition with four other FE colleges (FEFC 1995; 1999c). Also in contrast to College A, most students are local and attend specific sites. This feature gave the college a more parochial atmosphere than College A which is much larger, more amorphous and more heterogeneous in its intake. The most noticeable feature about the student cohorts is the diverse age range at College A, compared to College B where there were very few visible adult students and, in one site, a striking uniformity in student appearance and style.

Both colleges had been through major restructuring at the time the study began, and both had dynamic, ambitious new principals. Both colleges also pride themselves on having a pivotal role in their local communities and good links with local universities through franchised HE provision. However, 'restructuring' at College A created lower staff morale during the study than in College B.

c. Teachers' sample

Like the policy-based sample, the teachers' sample was both purposive and opportunistic⁶. As a 'purposive' sample, course leaders were likely to understand the complexities of GNVQ assessment and would have to resolve changes emerging from the pilot of new specifications. Three course leaders were keen to be involved, partly because of prospects for reflection on their practice, but equally because involvement in my research was good 'evidence' for the college's self-assessment report as part of imminent inspections during FEFC's second four-year cycle in 1999! One course leader refused to take part on the grounds of overwork, the first indication of how far pressures in colleges had increased since I last worked in them. In one team, then, I had two unit tutors and no course leader.

⁶ See Appendix 6 for details of the teachers' sample.

Thereafter, the sample was opportunistic since I asked course leaders to select tutors who might be interested to take part. There was therefore some element of theoretical sampling and *ad hoc* sampling. The eventual sample comprised three men and six women, reflecting, in part, the growing feminisation of FE teaching staff and a gender bias on HSC courses. However, students' later identification of five of the nine as 'their best teacher' showed that enthusiasm to take part also signified commitment to students and to improving their practice. I took account of variables relating to: length of teaching and assessment experience in academic and vocational programmes; subject background; units taught in GNVQs; role in GNVQ team. In order to test out some of the attitudes and beliefs from the in-depth study, some triangulation will occur through a questionnaire to a wider regional sample of staff teaching on the same courses (see below).

The sample covers a range of subject units with academic roots (for example, Psychology, Social Policy, Sociology, Behaviour and Motivation at Work) and vocational roots (for example, Human Resources, Planning a Health Campaign, Planning a Business Activity). The selection of subjects was random since they were governed by what the participants taught but where possible, I selected units that teachers in both colleges had in common, enabling me to compare the effects of subject discipline on teachers' values, beliefs and approaches to assessment. In the light of the discussion in Chapter Three about critical autonomy being located within subject traditions, an alternative to random selection would have been to construct a sample to cover specific subject traditions.

Research into professional responses to change in education presents largely supportive images of teachers as 'heroic resisters of policy', the professional struggling in the face of impossible policy injunctions or intensification of working practices (Gleeson and Hodgkinson, 1995; Helsby, 1999), the 'defeated professional' (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). Other studies present emerging conflict between different responses (for example, Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Seddons, 1998a). From such studies, it is possible to characterise responses as, variously: strategic compliance, embedded careerism, critical acceptance, disillusioned enthusiasm, rejection or resistance. Although labels are useful

initial organisers for analysis, they raise ethical dilemmas if participants cannot respond to them. It is also important not to become trapped by them. I evaluate this issue in chapters eight and nine.

Meanwhile, numerous researchers assert the significance of teachers' 'craft knowledge' (for example, Swann and Brown, 1997). In a context where conditions discussed in Chapter Two have intensified work in FE colleges, and where opportunities for professional development are limited (FEFC, 1999d), it might be tempting for researchers to both protect and promote teachers' professionalism. In addition, the skills and qualities needed to promote autonomy through assessment are complex and difficult. Nevertheless, it would be surprising if some aspects are not within teachers' powers to improve.

One effect of empathy with teachers is to tempt researchers to collude with views that problems are caused by students' poor ability/motivation, faults with the assessment system or overwork and low morale when it might also be that teachers' practice could be improved. It is therefore more straightforward to report issues about students or policy-makers to teachers but more difficult to discuss their own practice. As Riddell asks: "*if I fail to say to the teachers that their attitudes are part of the problem, am I evading an important issue ?*" (1989, p95). Yet this could also arouse controversy in an already difficult situation, or make some teachers feel even more despondent. The problem is compounded in a climate which already criticises university researchers for 'patronising' FE (Ainley, 1997, p1), when researchers are not themselves struggling with pressures of college life and can see problems from a position of relative professional autonomy.

Such dilemmas show that, although participants have agreed to take part, they may not really have given informed consent because issues discussed here might only unfold during the research (see Burgess, 1989). Nevertheless, I hoped that good relationships with teachers might enable informal discussion of 'good practice' to emerge naturally without having to discuss ineffective practice directly. In addition, feedback via draft reports and discussion of findings at a seminar at the end of the study were opportunities

to identify good practice. In the light of my own experience outlined in Chapter One, and barriers to change discussed in Chapter Two, I also recognised that time, resources and a positive atmosphere that encourages teachers’ own problem-based approaches to changing practice are needed. This study might begin a process of raising questions amongst some of the participants about good assessment practice, but only as the beginning of a long process of change.

d. Student sample

The potential student population was large. In 1999, 48,733 students completed Advanced GNVQs, a success rate of 55%. As Fitzgibbon (1997), Wolf, 1997 and QCA figures show (Ecclestone and Hall, 2000), GNVQ students have lower GCSE achievements than students doing A-levels. Particular variables in the student sample also included: route into GNVQ Advanced from Intermediate GNVQ, GSCE or A-level, or from school or college. Data for the groups I followed for both years of their GNVQ (1998-2000) are given here.

College and course	Retention %	Completion %	Distinctions %	Incoming (GCSE) %	Incoming (Int. GNVQ) %
Riverside HSC	72	85	25	80	20
Riverside BS	65	60	23	72	28
Bridgeview HSC	85	90	25	70	30
Bridgeview BS	75	83	22	75	25

Data show that retention rates vary between the two colleges: the national average for GNVQs in FE is about 75% (DfEE/FEDA, 1999) although FEFC figures show variations in retention rates for GNVQ subjects and level of study (FEFC, 2000b). The proportion of Distinction grades compares with the national average of 27% and 28% for HSC and Business courses respectively (Ecclestone and Hall, 2000). My study does not focus directly on issues of retention and completion but critics have tended to attribute problems to a flawed assessment model (Wolf, 1997b; Spours, 1997). Differences between active registrations and completion (see Appendix 1) suggest that some students take more than two years to complete a complicated portfolio and contact time in college full-time courses is only 15 hours a week. Such factors are therefore likely to be important in evaluating students' motivation in this study.

In order to test claims by designers that GNVQs develop motivation and autonomy, a sample of five motivated, autonomous students in each year group would, in theory, give such claims a favourable starting point for evaluation. It also enabled me to differentiate between the effects of GNVQ assessment over two years and contextual factors affecting motivation and autonomy, discussed in Chapter Three. I asked teachers to select five students in years One and Two whom they would describe as 'autonomous' and 'motivated', without being drawn, initially, into discussion of what I meant by these attributes. Details of the sample are in Appendix 7.

This enabled me to begin the fieldwork with observations about how teachers and students conceptualised these attributes and then to deepen my exploration of links between these constructs, assessment practices and the effects of the GNVQ model. My sample comprised students with a range of confidence, ability and different reasons for doing GNVQs. However, a significant feature is that 50% of the sample had Intermediate GNVQ as their incoming qualification, compared to a maximum of 30% in the overall population of the two groups (see above). The implications of this for constructs of motivation and motivation are discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine.

In light of the theoretical typology in Chapter Three, I thought they would display various types of autonomy and be motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically. By focusing on students deemed to be motivated and autonomous, I addressed directly criticism by other researchers that GNVQs encourage instrumental autonomy (Bates, 1998a; Bloomer, 1998; Helsby et al, 1998) but assumed that students would tend towards procedural autonomy. This focus also addressed my own concern that these other studies did not explore the effects on autonomy of variables such as student motivation or ability, fluctuations or drift during the two years, teachers' motivation or skills in assessment or the influence of peer group. Nor did these studies appear actively to seek evidence of different forms of autonomy.

Although it was not possible to look for a site of exemplary practice, the Popperian notion of 'looking for black swans' as evidence that disconfirms initial assumptions, could reveal factors which affect the development of autonomy and motivation through assessment practices. Black and Wiliam argue that *"useful lessons can be learned from studies which lie at various points between the 'normal' classrooms and special conditions set up by researchers"* (1998, p215). And, as Schofield argues, researchers might:

see what happens under what might be expected to foster relatively positive outcomes" and that "if [there were] serious problems at such a site, there would be reason to think that problems would be encountered in most places...if things went well at such a site, the study would then provide an opportunity to gain some more insight into how and why they go well and into what the still-intractable problems are (Schofield, 1993, p218).

This approach also enables researchers to differentiate between GNVQ-effects and non-GNVQ effects. Notwithstanding a theoretical justification, two teachers could not see value of choosing 'the best' students: *'we don't need help with the good students, we need help with the unmotivated ones'* (fieldnotes). This issue required particular attention in reporting back findings from the data to participants.

I gained access to students via the tutors, introducing myself by letter and a flyer outlining the research and ethical issues such as confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. It was surprising to me how much students liked the status of a 'posh' university. In particular, they liked getting letters from me that had the university logo and postmark⁷. Yet, access to students was predictably, more erratic than with staff. The slightly disjointed pattern of interviews reflects this messiness⁸. I was unable to sustain links with Riverside Year 2 students on one course for follow-up analysis and it is noticeable that access was more problematic with groups in Riverside college where students and staff seemed more disaffected, particularly with organisational re-structuring (see Chapter Eight). Teachers' interest in the research, and in how their students felt about my study, was therefore essential for maintaining access over the two years: where staff were positive, there was a difference in students' interest in my research.

From an initial group interview with between 3-5 students from each of the eight courses in my study, followed by 2 individual one-to-one interviews from this sample, I then narrowed down the sample to nine students who came to a 'construct analysis' seminar (see below) at the university in June 1999 and subsequently wanted to follow this up in November 1999. In effect, this became a self-selected sample, enabling me to explore their attitudes to learning and assessment in more depth on a one-to-one basis. The idea of 'progressive focusing' was informed at the outset by Parlett (1981). The actual practicalities of how to do it only became apparent through a combination of pragmatism (who was interested and turned up for interviews) and evolution of my own and participants' responses to the fieldwork (see Appendix 9 for details of fieldwork activities).

⁷ A humbling and significant incident arose in the first group interview at Bridgeview college where a student asked me directly 'but *why* do you want to do this research'? After offering a heartfelt but self-conscious rationale about improving assessment for students on courses like GNVQs, she said '*I think it's brilliant that people from a university care about people like us*'. For me, this encapsulated instantly issues of differentiated provision, labelling of people 'like us', hierarchies and status and my own moving away from an FE culture.

⁸ On-going and regular access was undermined when I switched from full-time to part-time Ph.D study.

2. METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

a. Policy-based interviews

Iterative focusing through different layers of interviews established the chronology of GNVQ development. This was a prelude to questions about debates accompanying the evolution of the assessment models⁹. Broad themes were the same in each interview but allowed for individual accounts of events and issues and for following up particular points. This enabled some comparison of accounts and interpretations.

The protocols and complexities of policy-based interviews are explored in-depth in Walford (1994) and Halpin and Troyna (1994). This literature enabled me to think through how different constituencies or individuals in my study might be defined as 'the powerful', on the grounds that they have considerable constitutional, legal and cultural resources that enable them to deflect or channel any research in which they are the object of enquiry (Walford, 1994). I was therefore prepared for the way that policy-based actors, and civil servants and ministers in particular, are good at presenting articulate, well-developed accounts of a policy's features and its intentions. Nevertheless, fieldwork notes reveal problems in defining policy-based actors as 'powerful' and these are explored in Chapter Six.

Policy-makers may also be proficient at scape-goating, taking the credit or passing the blame. And, although attempting to place "*what might otherwise seem unconnected events in context, over time in relation to other policy initiatives is a proper task for researchers..*", policy analysts risk making both the process of policy-making and its main architects seem more pro-active and competent than they really deserve (Edwards, 1993,). This tendency can lead to what Ball calls 'simple realism' (Ball, 1994b) which presents rational, *post-hoc* justifications of policy both descriptively and unproblematically and reduces analysis to a series of individual decisions and key events.

⁹ The chronology is summarised in Appendix 17 and the interview schedule in Appendix 10.

The danger of an over-rational, political account is reflected in an observation that many policy-based actors, particularly civil servants are:

visible bearers of specific historical, cultural, linguistic and constitutional traditions that together constitute a discourse within which research becomes enmeshed and to a considerable degree, reproduces (Fitz and Halpin, 1994, p40).

These tensions lead to a risk that interviewees often exaggerate their own role and influence. Research which relies on accounts rationalised long after the event therefore runs the risk of reinforcing, largely unwittingly, individual and collective versions of 'espoused theories' (Arygris and Schon, 1974) which may, in turn, arise from organisational myths, and 'retrospective exculpations' (Frank Coffield, informal communication).

Rational accounts of individual heroism and pivotal decisions are similarly tempting, both for policy-makers themselves, and for researchers. David Young's account of how, as a leading politician and head of the MSC, he introduced the TVEI is a compelling example. According to Young, the origins of TVEI were decided in Keith Joseph's garden after meeting a once-disaffected, now-motivated, young man on a training scheme:

That incident left a very deep impression on me...I then came to the idea that had kept me awake at night for the last few weeks. I suggested to Keith (Joseph) that we open a series of technical schools around the country. 'Let them be outside the existing state system if we have to', I suggested. We could run the programme through the MSC...'Let them succeed', I said, 'and we will infect the system. Then they will all want to change..' Keith Joseph sat and thought for a moment and then just said 'Yes' (Young, 1990, p60).

In the light of such accounts, Ball (1994b) and Batterson and Ball (1995) argue that narratology in both research and political autobiographies can reveal how policy-makers emphasise qualities, such as courage or instinct, in their actions and in those of others. Similarly, Malen and Knapp's symbolic perspective links well to discourse analysis

(1997). These approaches can counteract over-rationalised accounts or over-simplistic links between ideology and structure.

Notwithstanding all this good advice, the temptation of good stories, criticism of individuals and anecdotes of the "As Ron (Dearing) said to me on the stairs after the meeting..." variety, can lead a researcher unwittingly to forget all the theoretical objections to such accounts she so carefully armed herself with! More beguiling still are the revelations that simply cannot be publicly repeated, especially from individuals who are now outside the constraints of a professional role and no longer mind what they give away, or who may have old scores to settle or disappointments to get off their chest. These difficulties can lead, in turn, to selective quoting by the researcher to justify particular standpoints, or to protect individuals from blame. The simple realism Ball warns against is a particular trap in using illustrative quotes from the data.

It is also important to avoid the trap of 'policy science' where logistical issues dominate, alongside the distraction for researchers of 'policy busyness' (Whitty and Edwards, 1994). This was likely to be a particular problem in GNVQs where understanding and the need to describe the sheer complexity of developments and their technical characteristics could overwhelm analysis. Nevertheless, in addition to the need to explain the convoluted processes through which policy evolves, a commitment to multiple perspectives, discussed in Chapter Four, can offset this.

Notwithstanding pitfalls outlined here, policy-makers' accounts remain a crucial way to reconstruct policy-making processes and rationales for them. Their limitations and effects on interpretations can be dealt with reflexively and by documenting particular contexts and organisational rules that govern what interviewees say. These can be overt, as in the case of civil servants, or implicit, such as the effects of no longer being tied to a high status and public role, either because of being displaced or choosing to move on.

I adopted the overall guide of a 'focused' rather than 'semi-structured' interview (Robson, 1993, p240-241) based on interviewees' experiences, views and interpretations

of events (see Appendix 10). I used fieldwork notes to evaluate my interview techniques and phrasing of questions, to note any important issues which might have to be cross-checked later and to record impressions for later analysis. Following-up issues in subsequent interviews was perhaps unavoidable, although I made strong attempts to allow each actor to account for developments, debates and his or her own values as far as possible. All interviews were transcribed in full and analysed in representative categories (e.g. all the original GNVQ team in NCVQ, all three civil servants), using the approach discussed in Section Three.

b. Post-observation interviews (teachers)¹⁰

I aimed, initially, to differentiate, as far as possible, between ‘espoused theories’ and ‘theories-in-use’ (see Argyris and Schon 1974; Eraut 1995; Swann and Brown, 1997). I therefore needed to get as close as possible to what teachers and students think about, and how they construct their practice. Yet, although attempts at valid representation are important:

ultimately the researcher arises only at approximations of reality in terms of what happened and only at insightful awareness of the ambivalence of human motivation and behaviour (Saran quoted by Powney and Watts, 1987, p137)

In a review of the Scottish National Curriculum, Brown and Swann (1997) argue that teachers’ implementation of policy depends largely on how teachers think about their everyday practices, how far they agree with an initiative, assumptions they make about learning and how far they can reconcile an initiative with their aims for students. Citing Brown and McIntyre (1993), they argue that researchers need to understand how teachers interpret what they do in relation to policy injunctions and the conditions that affect their interpretations, judgements and actions (Brown and Swann, 1997). It is therefore not difficult to envisage “*situations where various centralised initiatives may be met in terms*

¹⁰ Please see Appendix 9 for a summary of fieldwork activities with teachers and students.

of paperwork, while teachers continue with their traditional practices and approaches in the classroom” (ibid, p97).

The effects of policy on practice is obscured further because teachers become proficient in using the “*official patterns of discourse and terminology*” (ibid, p97), a trait reinforced through official evaluations, such as inspections, which base their questions around this terminology. It is therefore difficult for researchers to:

successfully motivate subjects to put the necessary time and effort into revealing their authentic thoughts and concerns [and dealing] with the possibility that subjects might present plausible as opposed to authentic responses (Cooper cited by Brown and Swann, 1997 p98).

However, although researchers might generate their own interpretation of this discrepancy, interpretivist approaches demand that participants should be able to discuss discrepancies, to suggest corrections, to point out mistakes or to offer alternative interpretations. This problem implies as deep an immersion in the life of a GNVQ programme as possible, together with creating a climate that encourages discussion of authentic constructs.

It is therefore important to explore constructs since Brown and Swann argue that teachers adopt the discourse and language of policy only when expressly asked to discuss it and that this signifies the gaps between policy rhetoric and the reality of implementation. This led Brown and Swann to discuss policy directly only after a series of post-observation interviews designed to get closer to theories-in-use. Focused interviews carried out immediately after observing a lesson ask teachers to focus on what went well in the session, their values and goals for students and factors affecting achievement of these (see Appendix 11 for detailed rationale and structure).

Avoiding a hypothetical focus on the effects of policy, and focusing instead on real activities, is more likely to avoid espoused theories. However, such accounts may still be affected by a tendency for participants to tell interviewers what they think they want to

hear. There may also be an implicit realist assumption in the mind of the researcher that a valid account lurks somewhere to be made explicit. Instead, aspirations for getting closer to theories-in-use may need to draw on constructivist approaches between interviewer and interviewee to explore shared meanings (Knight and Saunders, 1999). A sequence of activities, including joint marking, might therefore produce a richer account.

d. Other interviews

In addition to post-observation interviews, I conducted an in-depth focused interview with each teacher as the penultimate fieldwork activity. I interviewed small groups of students, following these with individual interviews. It was not possible to use post-observation interviews as systematically with students as it was with teachers because of practical constraints such as students having other lessons. Student interviews were therefore more retrospective, based on exploration of their responses to feedback on assignments I had marked with their tutors (see Appendix 9 for sequence summary of methods used).

In any interview, a number of difficulties arise, summarised by Powney:

- tapes under-represent the communication
- further reduction occurs at transcription
- tapes skew in favour of the most articulate, particularly in group interviews

Recording and transcribing interviews tend to 'reify' the data while the notion of archiving transcripts reinforces the idea that 'truth' lies on the tape and, becomes objective via transcription. Because listening to tapes gives significantly deeper insights than reading transcripts does, I transcribed two interviews from policy-makers, students and teachers. Nevertheless, pressures for positivist methodology can lead to a view that a researcher's own understanding of events and processes is 'unreliable' data. Other problems arise over interpretations, where, instead of following up the interviewee's meanings, the researcher may subconsciously infer them. Conversely, interviewees can infer meanings and provide appropriate answers (Robson, 1993). In addition, differential

power between researchers and young people (see, for example, Coffield et al, 1986 and Ball et al, 2000) is shown by the ease with which academics ‘research down’ but young people rarely, if ever, ‘research up’. I indicate limitations to interviews as ‘a voice’ for students in Chapter Seven.

e. Participant observation

Becoming part of a community of practice requires “*entry into [its] particular social and ‘symbolic’ world through learning their social conventions and habits, their use of language and non-verbal communication and so on*” (Robson 1993, p194). During the study, I marked a total of 50 assignments across the sample of 18 students, using the official assessment specifications and then discussing interpretations of criteria and possible feedback comments to students with the tutor after she or he had marked them. I observed 12 lessons, 12 assessment activities, took part in a formal internal moderation of a set assignment, a team planning meeting at the beginning of the academic year and planned a term’s teaching with a unit tutor, using the specifications. After each activity, I tape-recorded a short 20 minute ‘post-observation’ interview, focusing on goals for students’ progress, actions to maintain and enhance goals and conditions affecting these (Brown and Swann, 1997) (see Appendix 9,11). In observations, I took extensive notes based on categories in the typology discussed in Chapter Three and then transcribed notes from three lessons and two assessment activities.

g. Informal data

Powney and Watts (1987) argue that research based largely on interview data needs what Stenhouse calls “the researcher’s second record”, a record of events, on the spot interpretations, accumulated knowledge of participants’ meaning systems, impressions from institutions. Examples in this study included notices in the corridors, the quality and atmosphere of classrooms, staffrooms and Learning Centres, atmospheres in libraries, corridors and coffee bars, staff and management attitudes to student absence or lateness, the quality of relationships between staff and students. I ensured that for each

visit, I took work with me and did this in coffee bars, libraries or empty classrooms¹¹. I also wrote notes after each interview, taking Robson's advice that the longer these are left, the poorer the account will be in terms of accuracy and fullness and more in line with existing schemas (1993).

This raises an ethical dilemma noted by Burgess (1989) since participants do not know about, or see, the notes that researchers make or their use of 'off the record' observations and comments. They have consented to the research, but it is questionable how far they have given their permission for subsequent interpretations or the unexpected areas the research might stray into.

h. Questionnaires

I used two questionnaires to explore opinions about the impact of GNVQ assessment on students' autonomy and motivation and on teachers' assessment activities. One was given to 70 students across the eight cohorts in the two colleges and was returned by 62 students (80%). Another was sent to 30 course coordinators and 30 unit tutors in Business and Health Advanced GNVQ courses, covering all FE and sixth form colleges in the North East and was returned by 34 (55%).

The problems of using questionnaires to explore opinions can be partially offset by generating the questions from in-depth study rather than *vice versa* and I used language and observations from fieldwork as the basis for a pilot questionnaire. However, there is also a value to questionnaires derived from the literature and then analysed before in-depth qualitative fieldwork. I followed the technical advice for compiling them in Robson (1993), piloted them with students and colleagues and received two days intensive help from the department's research associate for final design and analysing the results using SPSS software.

¹¹ I adopted a similar approach for policy-based interviews, working in offices at QCA, the waiting room in the DfEE and, on one occasion, in Tim Boswell's office while he attended Prime Minister's Question Time.

Well-known limitations to validity in questionnaires arise from ‘shadow cast’ over question design and subsequent analysis by researcher’s implicit assumptions (Rogers et al, 1995). Yet, I aimed to use the questionnaire to test broad trends or themes noticed in fieldwork and the practical training I would gain from design and analysis made questionnaires a useful addition to methods in this study.

i. Construct analysis

The best-known approach to a psychological instrument for analysing individuals’ constructs is George Kelly’s theory of personal constructs and a Personal Repertory Grid to elicit constructs. Kelly believed that people are scientists in the everyday world, anticipating events by observing patterns and regularities, similarities and contrasts. Kelly designed an instrument to analyse how people apply ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ constructs to explain and judge everyday events and behaviours (see Hillier, 1999).

My study did not use psychological theories to account for individual actions or motivation (see Chapter Three). In addition, since I was already using different approaches, I decided not to add another complex theoretical model with its own underlying epistemology because I would not be able to do it justice. An account of using Kelly’s construct theory to explore adult education tutors’ constructs about ‘learning’ showed that it is merely the beginning of an intensive series of activities to elicit informal theory. It adopts a rigid process of generating first and second order constructs, followed by analysis of these with participants (Hillier, 1999).

Instead, I generated statements about motivation, autonomy and formative assessment practices, using the fieldwork data and the typology from Chapter Three. In two separate groups (nine students and eight teachers) participants individually categorised the same set of statements as ‘realistic’ or ‘unrealistic’, ‘applicable’ or ‘non-applicable’. They then discussed barriers to development and the formative assessment methods that teachers used. Each session was carefully structured, lasted three hours and incorporated individual, pair and group work (see Appendix 14 for details).

I used each categorised set to type up individuals' responses to the statements, using this account in the last interview with each participant to explore ideas about autonomy and motivation and the impact of GNVQ assessment. The last interview was therefore more structured than previous focused interviews.

j. Documentary analysis

In addition to students' assignments, I examined official guidance for teachers and students in the two assessment models, the assessment specifications for relevant units in the study from the 1993, 1995, 1996 Capey pilot and 2000 models.

k. Participant verification

I arranged two seminars towards the end of the study, one for six ex-NCVQ officials at the QCA and one for teachers, seeking feedback on factual errors, areas of disagreement with my interpretations and views about usefulness and follow-up of findings. The teachers' seminar towards the end of the study showed that a short summary of issues, followed by the Ph.D chapters on students' and teachers' experiences was an effective sequence for gaining feedback. I also sent drafts of analysis to all 25 policy-based interviewees (six replied by letter), examples of transcripts to teachers and students and analysed one transcript at length with Michael, one of the 'black swans' discussed in Chapter Seven. I decided to have footnotes (Riddell, 1989, p92) if, and when, interpretations were different or could not be resolved, and used pseudonyms for colleges, teachers and students to protect their identity.

I hoped initially that regular, frequent access would enable students to help construct written accounts. Yet, logistics of maintaining access and the time needed for intensive discussion have reduced this to written comments on a short summary of findings and not a group discussion around the summary as I hoped. In addition, presenting findings in a format that would motivate students to read and respond requires other skills than

summarising. I evaluate some implications for participant involvement in analysis in Chapter Nine.

I. Pilot study

I piloted post-observation interview questions and general questions about the effects of GNVQs on assessment practices with teachers and a group interview schedule with two groups of students. I selected a school and a rural FE college and used personal contacts to gain quick access. The pilot enabled me to explore my initial assumptions, to refine questions and evaluate variables that needed to be taken into account. Analysis of the pilot data showed that:

- the school and rural college seemed to have a local, parochial atmosphere which would be likely to affect constructions and practices relating to autonomy and motivation in specific ways
- subject discipline was important to the types of autonomy that teachers valued and that critical autonomy is rooted in teachers' assumptions about their subject (see Chapter Three)
- general questions about autonomy, motivation and assessment practices caused uncertainty for teachers and created bland responses
- more authentic and enthusiastic responses came from focusing on 'real' events, or particular students or assignments (Brown and Swann, 1997)
- in contrast to Brown and Swann's claim (1997), teachers and students used the GNVQ language extensively and without prompting

- teams within institutions interpret GNVQ assessment 'locally', making the technical detail of this both overwhelming and essential for understanding the complexity of GNVQ assessment

3. APPROACHES TO ANALYSIS

I began with categories from the typology and those proposed by Malen and Knapp (1997), testing them on interim analyses of transcripts and fieldwork notes. This generated other categories. Following advice in Robson (1993), I did not allow data to accumulate and read transcripts and notes at regular intervals, generated analytical memos and noted ideas for papers and follow-up research projects (Wright Mills, 1970). I also asked Frank Coffield and a colleague to analyse the same three policy-based transcripts using a set of preliminary categories, and then discussed interpretations at length. Preliminary analysis of policy data showed that multiple perspectives are useful but, as Malen and Knapp themselves acknowledge, add considerably to the analytical burden! The post-observation interview adapted from Brown and Swann (1997) suggested categories for understanding how teachers reconcile a policy initiative with their own values, organisational constraints and expectations of students.

Although I had already generated general categories, I began the final intensive period of analysis by exploring and coding initial themes in transcripts and fieldwork notes using 'open', 'selective' and 'axial' coding (Strauss, 1984; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This approach shows that analysis of qualitative data can be iterative and organic but also that researchers must impose order on the process. Intensive, systematic coding maximises the possibility of grounding at least some ideas in the data and on actively seeking discrepancies, rich detail and imaginative connections. The approach enables *in vivo* codes to derive from language used by participants and to connect local meanings with broader concerns. It also enables categories to be distilled into central themes for follow-

up sampling in data collection. Word by word coding encourages new ideas or connections: I did this in the first reading of each transcript (95 in total).

I coded data from students then teachers, by college, course and year and last, by individual students. For policy-makers, I analysed by constituency (for example, the original GNVQ team, all NCVQ officials etc.). However, an important practical constraint is that this intensive, collaborative¹² and painstaking approach does not fit well with individual, part-time research like the Ph.D. It is clear that prolonged, intensive periods of analysis are essential in qualitative research.

Although not intended as a scientific measure of hypotheses, the well-known Popperian notion of ‘looking for black swans’ enabled me to maximise the chance of discovering a ‘negative’ case, ie. those students or teachers who offered a contrast to the rest. Given the criticism of limited forms of autonomy in GNVQs discussed earlier, I aimed to find students who might develop deeper forms. In addition, other ways of not taking the apparent ‘reality’ of transcripts at face value were to quantify themes or ideas in transcripts, to look for silence or absence of issues or, conversely, seeing if an emphasis given by participants might really signify the opposite case.

Despite this cautionary approach, in order to be accessible, analysis is usually communicated through “*second order constructs and categories which can rigidify, simplify and reify the actual interpretations, perspectives and meanings held by teachers and pupils*” (Ball 1981, pxiii). In the light of discussion in Chapter Four, the eventual presentation is therefore only ever an approximation of reality. In qualitative research, presentation somehow has to maintain analytical integrity in line with researchers’ aims and values, account for complexity and reflexivity whilst being accessible to different audiences (see Riddell, 1989).

¹² In particular, Strauss portrays long, intensive discussions about coding and interpretation, amongst teams of researchers and students (see also Knight and Saunders, 1999). I have not yet experienced this in the universities I have worked in.

This raises issues about using quotes. Two particular criticisms about how qualitative researchers use data seem relevant. James Tooley argues that researchers often ‘example’ their pre-conceived, partisan ideas through selective quotes (1998) while Tony Edwards argues that quotes frequently do not extend an idea or even, in some cases, illustrate it (informal communication). I have therefore aimed not to use quotes as self-evident justifications or because, like journalism, they happen to tell a good story. But nor have I adopted the detailed, narrative approach used by Bloomer (1999) and Hodgkinson et al. (1996), partly because of the size of my sample and the space I have available for analysis of fieldwork data, but also because I have not aimed for a thoroughly ‘grounded’ approach.

Instead, I wanted to both ‘tell a story’ through participants’ accounts and my own observations whilst grounding the quotes in the analysis outlined above. In addition, the research training provided by a Ph.D should also bring integrity and awareness of pitfalls to the fore since apprentice researchers are striving to maximise their reflexivity and integrity. Aiming for complexity, and discussing analysis with participants, might also enhance validity and authenticity. Whilst not striving for reliability and generalisable observations, triangulation increases both validity and reliability. In order to give maximum credibility to participants, I have edited quotes to remove repetition, confusing phrasing, half-finished thoughts¹³ or a diversion from the main point, indicated by ‘...’ in the text.

Lastly, although useful as organising categories, the various labels used about students’ attitudes or teachers’ responses to change, mentioned in Chapters Two and Three and above, raise ethical issues. It is easy, for example, for researchers to construct categories that students might resist or challenge. Joe Harkin (1999b) relates the need to create dialogue with research ‘subjects’ to the prevailing lack of voice and dialogue already

¹³ My decision to do this contrasts with accounts which present an ‘authentic’ voice by replicating exactly dialect and hesitations in everyday speech. Teachers and students in my study reported being embarrassed by the transcripts because they made them ‘look inarticulate’. Given that researchers polish their own writing until they appear as articulate as possible and never write in dialect or slang, this raises questions about how to present ‘authentic’ voices in research accounts (see, for example, approaches in Coffield et al, 1986).

experienced by many college students. It is therefore important for researchers to acknowledge their own generalisations about participants' responses and motives, the limitations of interviews as an intervention in exploring them and problems in taking accounts back, discussed above.

CHAPTER SIX

BEWITCHED, BOTHERED AND BEWILDERED: A POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE GNVQ ASSESSMENT MODEL 1992-2000

INTRODUCTION

Analysis and evaluation here draw from intensive coding and the outline discussed in Chapter Five. It uses categories generated from Malen and Knapp's framework for policy analysis discussed in Chapter Four¹, and relates the typology developed in Chapter Three to infer constructions of motivation and autonomy amongst interviewees. A draft of Section One, in the form of a paper for the *Journal of Education Policy*, was sent to all interviewees and discussed in October 1999 by a group of five ex-NCVQ officials now working in the QCA. Written comments were also received from six interviewees representing external constituencies.

Section One focuses on the evolution of the GNVQ assessment system, its aims for autonomy, and the policy processes and debates which accompanied these.

Section Two explores implicit and explicit constructions of autonomy and motivation that seem to emerge from policy-makers' aims for GNVQs and in their views about debates in GNVQ policy development.

Section Three evaluates the implications of GNVQ developments for assessment policy in the post-compulsory curriculum and for policy-based constructions of autonomy and motivation.

¹ See Appendix 15 for an outline of analytical categories.

1. THE EVOLUTION OF GNVQs²

a. Bewitched by a vision

The political origins of GNVQs have been analysed by Williams (1999) and Sharp (1998) while many of the problems explored in this section can be traced to the diverse aims that surrounded the introduction of GNVQs, discussed in Chapter One. Potential tensions therefore dogged GNVQs from the outset. Williams (1999) argues that GNVQs were introduced by the DfE as a short-term, 'quick fix' initiative for more post-16 options. For the ED which funded their development, GNVQs complemented NVQs in full-time education. As Minister for Further and Higher Education between 1992 and 1995, Tim Boswell³ believed GNVQs responded to the politically sensitive problem of youth unemployment but also to a desire to raise the profile of FE:

there was a general wish, I think it came from the Prime Minister because John Major actually saw this himself, raising the profile of the ordinary bloke which of course is consistent with upgrading the Polys⁴..and indeed the liberalisation of the FE sector which was also taking place and a wish to give FE if not an exclusive track, at least a major profile in that area (interview, Tim Boswell 1998)

The FE sector was therefore becoming both more familiar to policy-makers and a target for high-profile initiatives (see also Sharp, 1998). Like the CPVE and TVEI, GNVQs drew on, and were fuelled by a fusion of vocational progressivism and liberal humanism (see also Dale et al, 1989; Radnor et al, 1989; Yeomans, 1998; Williams and Raggatt, 1999; Hickox and Moore, 1999). They emerged from disparate, informal moves to reconcile different interests amongst government departments, the NCVQ itself and some individuals in awarding bodies. Concerns to continue the impact of TVEI, to bolster NVQs and to improve the status of general vocational qualifications combined with a

² A detailed chronology of events in the development of Advanced level GNVQ is summarised in Appendix 17

³ All interviewees are anonymous, with the exception of Tim Boswell and John Capey whose role immediately reveals their identity.

desire to offer something motivating yet credible for non-A level students. It is therefore difficult, from my data, to attribute the inception of GNVQs to Ministerial dictat or Eggar's individual foresight (see Sharp, 1998). Instead:

[GNVQ] started all over the place and it was a compromise of different agendas⁵..of course the interesting thing with it starting off in different places, different people started with different ideas about what it was going to be about...we had BTEC thinking 'this is a good idea, we'll get an endorsement on our qualification', we had NCVQ thinking 'oh yes, this is our product, we've designed it'...everybody had a slightly different view although they didn't know it then. And, of course, this initial weakness...came back to haunt us in a big way, particularly in the assessment context (civil servant 2).

Despite latent conflicts to emerge later, my inference of a 'passionate' vision emerged strongly from the interview data and my fieldnotes. Data revealed the extent to which the GNVQ initiative generated strong personal and professional commitments, particularly inside NCVQ, but from other constituencies too. As Bates (1989) points out, the values and missions of policy-based actors, their personal and professional experiences and the particular institutional context they operate in, are essential factors in understanding the debates which surround policy.

Interviews revealed aspirations heavily permeated by liberal humanism and vocational progressivism, albeit from different interests. There were therefore strong normative themes, such as support for non-traditional students to have wider access to a meaningful curriculum and more equitable assessment, and a desire to make teachers more 'student-centred'. Led by Gilbert Jessup, a small team within NCVQ developed the new qualification with great enthusiasm, particularly in relation to the radical implications of

⁴ 'Polys' refers to the ex-polytechnics which were given university status in the 1993 Further and Higher Education Act which also detached further education colleges from the local education authorities.

⁵ Although continuity and underlying themes can be inferred with hindsight, it is important not to overplay them as coherent, rational or conspired: as Tony Edwards (1993) points out, policy analysis can often make actors seem more in control of events and knowledgeable about their actions than they really are. Combining retrospective accounts from different constituencies can exacerbate this impression. So too can participant checking of accounts.

GNVQ assessment. There were many examples in the data of this excitement and this is typical:

I thought [GNVQs] presented real opportunities for transference...that I've never encountered in my educational experience, either as a teacher or as a student learner before. It also related to the concept of the adult learner, the learning contract etc which philosophically I felt was really appropriate for the population that we were talking about, which was mostly ...young adults, which is to do with their intellectual development and the way they feel about themselves and their autonomy and their right to decide (NCVQ official 6).

Designers brought into NCVQ for their assessment expertise also had an absorbing technical interest in applying principles of OBA to a mainstream qualification:

I've done enough teaching and enough educational psychology to know that for a lot of kids, it's not fit to have an exclusive diet of examinations so this looked like an interesting way forward and the whole issue around what could loosely be called criterion-referencing and whether that would work or not work, having also been part of the National Curriculum. So there was...an atmosphere in which it was seen as the qualification of the future and certainly the exam boards were very nervous of it, that it would siphon off a lot of students and revenue (NCVQ official 7).

The implications of these aims for views about autonomy and motivation are discussed in Section Two. It is important to note here that frustration with didactic, uninspiring forms of education and what were seen as inappropriate notions of 'standards' were not only prevalent inside NCVQ. There were strongly-held views, and therefore strong normative themes about what counts as a 'good' education or important values to support, amongst other constituencies:

Having been to a secondary modern school, I identified strongly with the sort of kids that might do [GNVQ], and also from my background in occupational psychology and learning...if you could make the qualification about something that was real to these kids then they wouldn't give up. That's very idealistic but... (civil servant 1)

It seemed to us that there was a real opportunity here to look at the post-16 curriculum and to design it afresh, to actually work out what was [needed in]educating 16-19 year

olds, and the knowledges, understanding, skills, abilities and contexts that we wanted to see developed (awarding body official 2)

my wife is, or was then...very active, very much involved in adult literacy and that caused great excitement..I was if anything more FE inclined than HE. I totally believe that Oxford and theoretical physics can care for themselves fairly well but actually, you need somebody to stick up for FE (Tim Boswell)

there was great potential for a tremendous alliance between the NCVQ and the best of its idealism, and the FE sector, at least that part of the sector which shared ideas about access and flexibility and also, like NCVQ, felt beleaguered...because FE people did not feel part of the education system, you know, and I think they would have welcomed an alliance (external body official 2/General Policy Committee (GPC)⁶)

The initial vision illuminates another strong theme in the data, namely a powerful *esprit de corps*, and intense personal development within the GNVQ team in the early stages. Social motivation and strong normative values are very apparent in the organisational culture created by Gilbert Jessup⁷:

one of its strengths as a work-place [was] that there was always a vigorous debate ...it was always this tension that we didn't want to finish up with just another A-level...at each step of that, there's been some soul searching about whether this is the right way and what are the implications...the Gilbert Jessup perspective, that once you start moving this, you're putting control back to the teacher and not to the student because assessment is no longer clear..somebody has to interpret it and that kind of educational control and those issues. So that was always a lively one. There were other good topics that you could guarantee a lively discussion on.. (NCVQ official 7).

[Gilbert] had the support of the department, particularly for employment at that stage, because they set up the NCVQ virtually based on what his vision of what this national framework could be. So, of course, one was very excited by that, and Gilbert was, Gilbert is, very good at giving people opportunities to take things on which we would be very unlikely to get in most organisations and particularly at that time...so it was a very exciting thing to be involved in (NCVQ official 1).

I miss it enormously...it was the Golden Age of my career...GNVQ crystallised a lot of good, exciting initiatives into a coherent package...I think everyone felt that they were on a bit of a crusade.. (NCVQ official 9)

⁶ The NCVQ's General Policy Committee (GPC) comprised a diverse range of constituencies and interests (see Appendix) and was responsible for overall political direction and implementation. It was also the focus for much debate about principles underpinning the assessment model.

Despite what one civil servant referred to as a "*negligible budget*" for development, the nine month development timescale to introduce GNVQs, given to the NCVQ by the DfE in 1991 was accepted because the design of a new qualification was, in fact, already underway during 1990 through a series of "*very, very intense meetings*" amongst a small team of academics, NCVQ officials and a principal of a sixth form college:

there were just six of us and we sat down, ... and really just thrashed through all the [assessment] principles in which we were interested...all the six people had very, very extensive experience of innovation, stretching back 15, 20 years in [VET] and were well aware of the type of tensions that existed across the whole system (NCVQ official 2)

Designers recognised that the overall vision would be contentious:

We didn't want to put our heads too high above the parapet because then people would begin to say 'it should look like this, or like this', and Gilbert [Jessup] had quite a commitment to thinking relatively clearly about the policy objectives...[so] that we didn't have too many pressures in the first instance..It was very much, 'let's read widely, let's think widely, let's consult, let's ask, but discretely but don't let's announce that this is going on because otherwise we won't be able to develop a qualification with relative ideological freedom' (NCVQ official 2).

b. Bothered by an assessment maelstrom

Despite excitement about a radical incursion into mainstream assessment policy, there were mixed blessings as GNVQs moved out from the policy margins:

[vocational assessment] ...has always been treated as less important and so it was less controlled...and as soon as we became identified with the education and curriculum...things became a lot more squeezed... (NCVQ official 1)

There was, as Williams (1999) also notes, substantial opposition to the whole initiative inside the NCVQ itself and some senior officials did not want to be involved at all:

⁷ Gilbert Jessup was Head of Research and Development at the NCVQ until 1997 and architect of the OBA model in NVQs and GNVQs. All interviewees in my study see him as a pivotal influence in developments.

actually, I thought BTEC should have done it and my first reaction was to say 'we shouldn't do this'....I didn't join the NCVQ really to have anything to do with the educational system and quite a lot of the other people there didn't either. It wasn't what we were about (NCVQ official 5)

The vision was not, therefore, widely shared outside 'Gilbert's team' and NCVQ officials describe a "*two buildings culture*" at Euston Road (head office of NCVQ in London), with little interaction between mainstream NVQ developments and the GNVQ initiative.

Notwithstanding this separation, the competence-model of NVQs was central to intense internal debate about how OBA could achieve 'reliable, national standards'⁸ whilst attracting non-traditional learners and gaining parity of esteem with A-levels. It was widely felt, inside and outside NCVQ, that 'reliability' had not been a feature of previous initiatives or of BTEC qualifications.

Attempts to develop an assessment model around new epistemological principles, and to gain political agreement on them were compromised at the outset when the DfE instructed NCVQ to include grading and external testing and would not allow unit accreditation. However, instead of conceding to traditional associations of grading with norm-referencing and compensation⁹, designers aimed to preserve 100% coverage of outcomes whilst encouraging learner autonomy. They developed a criterion-referenced grading system that rewarded generic processes of planning, managing and evaluating learning across a GNVQ programme, shown in a portfolio of achievement. External tests were introduced more instrumentally to assess underpinning knowledge in the subject units.

⁸ There is a very complex technical and epistemological debate underpinning the political divide over 'standards'. Divisions arise over how 'reliability' and 'validity' are secured in assessment, and over which is more important. A contentious aim of Gilbert Jessup's model was that explicit, scientifically-precise specifications of desired outcomes and criteria to assess them can produce precise, valid and authentic judgments of performance. He argued that precision and agreement over outcomes improves reliability between assessors. In contrast, traditional notions of reliability rely on selection and rank ordering through external tests standardised outside the remit of teachers (see Jessup, 1991; Wolf, 1995; Boys, 2000 for detailed discussion).

⁹ I.e. weighting different parts of the grading criteria in a marking scheme or sampling parts of the syllabus for summative assessment.

Such moves began a process of bolting-on additional features of assessment frequently and at great speed, as new problems or political imperatives arose. Between 1992 and development of a new model for 2000, the assessment model was overhauled three times, with many accompanying attempts to improve guidance and explication of specifications and expected standards for students' work.

Early problems arose over the external tests. Despite attempts by the NCVQ to design unit tests centrally, within one year the three awarding bodies were producing 2000 tests annually. As one NCVQ official pointed out, awarding bodies had to invest a great deal of money in GNVQ to compensate for lack of initial funding, or, as one awarding body official believes, to 'bale out' a flawed model. Another NCVQ official argued that without marketing by BTEC, the new qualification would not have had public credibility (NCVQ official 6). Nonetheless, tests became a liability because critics compared them to A-level examinations. Friction between the NCVQ and the awarding bodies over tests were exacerbated by a new, subordinate role for awarding bodies unused to investing in, and conforming to, a qualification designed by a quango¹⁰.

In spite of support from many external constituencies for the aims of the GNVQ initiative, friction and confusion were rife from the outset. There was political hostility from awarding bodies to NCVQ's role, particularly from BTEC, which was, according to one awarding body official, instructed by the DfE to offer GNVQs (see also Sharp, 1998) and then privatised so that it had no choice! Not only was there resentment at NCVQ's incursion into an arena where, as Williams shows (1999), the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) and BTEC had already developed qualifications but also competing normative perspectives about what 'good' assessment involves. CGLI and the RSA Examinations Board¹¹ were supportive of an OBA model (awarding body official 2) and both awarding bodies saw the chance to make inroads into the qualifications market dominated by BTEC at Advanced and sub-degree level. BTEC, in contrast, saw itself as champion of holistic assessment approaches (awarding body officials 1 and 2) and had

¹⁰ Although the QCA is a regulatory body, according to three external officials and two civil servants, the status of the NCVQ as a regulatory or accrediting body was never clear.

vigorously opposed competence-based assessment in NVQs (see also Sharp, 1998).

Latent turf wars, experienced in the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (see Radnor et al, 1989) led to extreme acrimony between the diverse constituencies involved.

Nonetheless, awarding bodies had to collaborate. Each took overall responsibility for a particular subject area (eg. RSA and Science, BTEC and Business) and for developing the assessment specifications. Individual subject development was overseen by a GNVQ Development Group and led by an NCVQ official. Specifications were written at enormous haste, first by the small team of NCVQ designers which developed the model and then, after the first pilot, by small subject committees. These comprised development officers from FEU, school and college inspectors, the awarding bodies, employers' and professional organisations, subject associations, representatives from colleges, schools and universities. These groups determined the content of units so that writers could turn this into assessment specifications against a 'template' written by the NCVQ design team. The first units drew on expertise from commercial consultants and NCVQ officials who had developed occupational specifications in NVQs. Everyone brought their own normative perspectives about assessment:

It was iterative, you brought in someone who had knowledge of, say, health and social care - what we were desperate for was subject knowledge - and then they'd write a few units and we had a look at them ..it was a very difficult process...there are very few people who are able to write units [according to the assessment model's principles] ...what they were essentially doing was just replicating what they thought was important which was OK because they were experts in their field...we did use writers who were more familiar with vocationally-oriented programmes [and] with adult learning and obviously the people who were involved in the NVQ standards' programme..understood what state of the art vocational provision should look like.... but it was very led by their own perceptions of what was required and we didn't have time to consult very widely at that stage.. (NCVQ official 2)

However, there was also organisational conflict. Whereas NCVQ officials perceived lack of 'the right experience' amongst awarding bodies in writing specifications to their outcome-based template, awarding bodies and external constituencies saw NCVQ

¹¹ Contrary to popular perception, RSA separated from the Royal Society of Arts in 1983.

ignoring their essential expertise. There were, therefore, clashes between assessment traditions, even inside the NCVQ itself:

I think one of the things that may have happened is that we ... turned to the same fairly limited [number of] people often drawn on because they were familiar with NVQ and we then asked them to go through a kind of cultural conversion and come out with a new style of stuff..(NCVQ official 7)

As a result, leaders of subject groups had to write specifications around epistemological principles whilst trying to impose common interpretations and mediate interests between competing constituencies. The pressures were extreme:

We didn't have a master plan. We never did. I think the most you could say is we had an idea about what it would look like and we could recognise when it wasn't there. But I don't think that at any stage you could say we knew all the time what [specification writers] should be doing and it was just a terrible job to get them to do it (NCVQ official 5).

It was very intense work...it was very much learning and developing from what you learned. It didn't seem there were lots of things you could borrow from..and we did produce lots of information [about the conventions of writing GNVQ units], lots of drafts and masses of paper about how to do this (NCVQ official 1)

All this exacerbated tensions between the awarding bodies and the NCVQ and fuelled criticisms outside NCVQ of a model 'out of control':

there was no template produced, lots of little groups all over the country were just allowed to go off and just invent something with virtually no guidance as to what was the purpose and what this was supposed to look like (awarding body official 2)

Initially, the original team edited unit specifications themselves against the model they had designed and there was an organisational culture of intense personal commitment to the model and its aims. But keeping a tight rein on it rapidly became impossible. The subject committees reconciling competing interests in the specifications, were often, as one official points out, made up of the very lobbyists who wanted 'their bits' in the GNVQ. A recurring image in interviews is the phrase 'a camel designed by a committee'

(‘and pastured on a water meadow’, according to awarding body official 2) and there is no dissension in interpretations over the messy processes that ensued:

The subject committees [were] saying 'we ought to have this' but they always overloaded the qualification so the job comes down to the subject adviser, the problem being that they were at the mercy of the various constituencies and often were not subject specialists, which I suspect was an NCVQ weakness, that you hadn't got people with the knowledge themselves to say 'I'm cutting out a third of this unit' ... the SCAA officers..have got enough kind of clout to say 'this has just got too much or this hasn't got enough in and you've missed out something that is important'. [in NCVQ] there wasn't that culture sufficiently, you've got people doing subjects..but doing it as kind of administrators almost (NCVQ official 7)

Things got added in and there are... very simple things about revising any qualification: you use the subect committee and you have consultations. Everyone will say 'it's too big but there is nothing you can take out.'..(NCVQ official 1)

In parallel to this *ad hoc*, fraught approach to making outcomes and ‘standards’ explicit, GNVQs’ increasingly high profile in schools put their explicitly-stated outcomes under overt political scrutiny:

When John Redwood was Secretary of State for Wales, he was actually sent the specifications for GNVQ Part One...and he made direct changes in the content..that was unprecedented...he didn't like the term 'social groups' because at that stage Margaret Thatcher had said there was 'no such thing as society', so it had to be changed to 'groups' (NCVQ official 2).

These problems partly confirm what Eraut calls ‘Parkinson’s law’ of curriculum development (1997), a tendency for diverse groups to produce overloaded specifications. In GNVQs, this was exacerbated by competing organisational and political traditions of assessment which affected public presentation of the outcome-based model:

one of the awarding bodies was particularly potent and went to a level of detail and prescription of...all the things you must tick off and check off that we had never, never dreamt of in our wildest dreams..the awarding bodies came out with a book per unit and by that time it was too late (NCVQ official 6).

The job of specification writers, seemed then, essentially one of project management within an organisational culture of a *'very high level of motivation... and extremely long hours'* (NCVQ Official 6), rather than developing a coherent mainstream initiative with a high political profile. Lack of initial funds and a piecemeal process of bidding to the Employment Department to fund each stage of development contributed to lack of coherence.

Every account showed starkly how an unprecedented array of constituencies, from very different subject, educational and assessment cultures, have constructed the assessment model: one civil servant points out that no other qualification has had so many people *"dabbling in it"*. Before specifications reached teachers and students, specifications and accompanying attempts to clarify them were reinterpreted by awarding body verifiers, OFSTED and FEFC inspectors, ministers and civil servants, staff running the GNVQ support programme in the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) and textbook writers. It is therefore helpful to see GNVQ specifications as the cannibalised 'policy texts' discussed in Chapter Four. In this light, their production seems particularly chaotic and contentious in GNVQs.

In the midst of technical confusion and organisational rivalries over the assessment specifications, the Department of Education (DfE) began to see the political significance of GNVQs. A much cooler, more rational tone appears in interview data:

we increasingly felt it would be an acid test of the viability of this thing that we had to provide a progression route into higher education (civil servant 2)

The phrase 'this thing' symbolises a distance, rather than the more intense vision of NCVQ. It also symbolises something which had grown unexpectedly and problematically, important. Significantly, referring to GNVQs as 'this thing' or 'the thing' and GNVQ students as 'this type of student' emerged in interviews with civil servants from the education wing of the DfEE, OFSTED, and inspectors.

Representatives from this 'side' of divisions appearing over GNVQs began to assert control. A shift towards Advanced GNVQs' credibility in universities, together with the

development of Part One GNVQ in the post-14 curriculum, meant that OFSTED became particularly influential. Despite the fact that school-based GNVQs form about 25% of provision at Advanced level, all interviewees see OFSTED as pivotal in moving debates about desirable forms of assessment firmly to the 'traditional reliability' side of the standards' faultline outlined earlier. There is resentment from officials in NCVQ and external bodies that credibility in schools dominated political concerns since FE colleges were seen as able to adapt to GNVQs:

It seemed to me that there was a kind of unspoken factor...and that was that this qualification had to be delivered in sixth forms of schools so you couldn't apply any kind of resource requirements in terms of specialist resources, equipment, background in the industry or training. So you had school teachers blundering into this with the lack of specialist knowledge with no materials and a style of learning that they had never had to use before (awarding body official 2/GPC).

And, whilst OFSTED made direct comparisons with A-levels, NCVQ officials saw the FEFC inspectorate as having a more realistic view of what 'parity of esteem' meant:

FEFC were much more in sympathy with the objectives because they recognised the type of student we were talking about....my view is that OFSTED weren't anti but they were rather like some of the hard-liners in SCAA...I think what underlay their views was 'we don't mind you doing what you are doing - it meets the needs of a group- .but please shut up and recognise that they aren't as good as the ones doing [A-level]. So don't make waves about what you are doing for parity or equivalence' ..Nobody ever said that, it's not written down anywhere, but it's my impression that that's what the sticking point came to (NCVQ official 6).

In addition to criticism within OFSTED and SCAA, other critics polarised around the 'standards' faultline and the meaning of 'parity of esteem'. From 1994, civil servants and NCVQ officials were aware of growing criticism about an over-burdened assessment model, beginning with an FEFC report in 1994 and of research by Alison Wolf for the Employment Department (Wolf et al, 1994). According to Tim Boswell, there were also fears amongst ministers that the GNVQ model suggested potential dilution of 'standards' in modular A-levels.

Slippage over different meanings of 'standards' intensified as concerns about the effects of over-loaded assessment on students' motivation began to slide into issues of public credibility and rigour of 'standards' in comparison to A-levels. Press coverage of 'mickey mouse' tests, and criticism inside policy of test questions, were paralleled in Alan Smithers' high profile television report (1994). At the same time, OFSTED reports (1995, 1997) and Dearing's review of 16-19 qualifications pushed support amongst FEFC inspectorate, NCVQ, the awarding bodies and the FEU for 'distinctive yet manageable assessment' into concerns about 'credibility', 'reliability' and 'rigour'. This division was very apparent in interviews with inspectors, as well as in official inspection reports but the latest report, jointly written by OFSTED and FEFC, shows how far the shift has gone (OFSTED/FEFC, 1999). Symbolically, this report was published by the FEFC but OFSTED are the first author.

Interview data showed the extent to which organisational frustration and rivalry and political dissent started to dominate attributions of blame for problems, displacing the early visionary aspirations. At the same time, a discernible, semi-rational chronology in the data of apparently pivotal events and key personalities gave way to strong views about disputes which had to be mediated, won or conceded. Frequently these were symbolised by battle imagery: NCVQ would hold "*war cabinets*" to reconcile new problems and there were internal "*battle royals*" over tensions in the assessment model (NCVQ officials 5, 2). OFSTED were "*the hawks*" over directions in assessment (NCVQ official 7), while Tim Boswell invoked historical battle imagery to describe OFSTED's political role:

Certainly I think the OFSTED side of it was very, very important in terms of putting a warning shot across the bows of NCVQ...we may even have used them at some point as a sort of third party endorsement for some change. To put it vulgarly and slightly unfairly, as a sort of battering ram on NCVQ (Tim Boswell)

Once GNVQs moved into the post-14 curriculum through Part One provision, a more populist political perspective on assessment appeared:

there are strong public perceptions of what rigorous assessment looks like...if we were not seen to be taking clear and firm action in the response to concerns that had been passed to the public domain through OFSTED...that would damage the qualification (civil servant 3). And, as Tim Boswell believed: "you need to be seen to be as addresssing the problems" (interview, May 1999).

OFSTED's statutory access to Ministers had an important political impact but less dramatically, and more predictably, influences were also attributed to:

a whole range of interactions [which] were going on, correspondence going from Ministers and [NCVQ] officials, separate meetings..with the inspectorates,...so there were lots of levers operating (civil servant 3)

Yet concerns over 'rigour, consistency and reliability' were not raised at the CBI conference in 1995 where Tim Boswell outlined a 6-point plan for simplifying GNVQ assessment and making it more manageable. John Capey and a senior NCVQ official believed that the NCVQ Council did not initially see the political significance of the CBI speech.

Using a fighting image, Capey pointed out:

it was me saying to the NCVQ Council 'this is what [Boswell's] saying'...I translated it into seven points, ..at the time, they just saw it as a Minister's speech and I said 'it isn't, I really do believe it's a great deal more significant than that. We have been given a gauntlet and the gauntlet said if you don't get the job done, somebody else will' (John Capey)

Changes to simplify the grading themes and portfolio had already been introduced in 1995. A more radical overhaul was envisaged by the high-profile committee, commissioned by Gilbert Jessup and chaired by John Capey, principal of Exeter College and an NCVQ Council member. It coincided with the DfE's review of 16-19 qualifications chaired by Ron Dearing. According to John Capey and the NCVQ official serving his committee, the two chairs worked closely to make similar recommendations about GNVQ assessment. Although John Capey sees his review as 'complementary but independent' to Dearing's, other actors believed that resolving the burden of assessment

was soon dominated by concerns about rigour and reliability that came from the Dearing Review:

whenever you ask for a review, it doesn't matter what the terms of reference are, you get other agendas coming in. So the thing to simplify the assessment...also got pretty mired with 'make it more reliable and rigorous' and these didn't sit particularly comfortably..there was a whole sub-plot there about increasing the rigour and reliability of the qualification (NCVQ official 7)

By the time that Capey reported in 1995, slippage from manageability to rigour and credibility was clear:

if you look at the recommendations of Capey..it was a much more tentative recommendation you know..but by the time Capey got to Dearing and summarised in his study, it was set in stone, 'it will be this and you will do this and you will do that' (NCVQ official 7)

Following a three-year pilot of changes from 1996, external assessment forms one third of a new model in 2000, together with changes to grading criteria and levels of grades and to the format and content of the unit specifications. Key skills are displaced to a discrete qualification and systems of quality assurance emphasise national moderation of grading. These changes overturn many fundamental principles of the first model discussed in Chapter One, such as 100% mastery of outcomes, portfolio-based formative and summative assessment, grading themes to encourage generic forms of autonomy, negotiated assignments incorporating key skills.

Although some external bodies thought the model would settle down once teachers became familiar with it, and if its implementation was properly resourced, change was politically expedient. As a result, although the Capey Review was publicly welcomed as improving GNVQ assessment (or what Tim Boswell referred to symbolically as *"modifying the pure Jessup, if I can put it that way"*), new problems appeared as different competing interests had to be reconciled. A new model was designed between the autumn of 1995 and spring 1996 and piloted in 90 centres from September 1996. It was funded

with £29 million (the first large injection of money) and produced rapid growth in numbers of staff working on GNVQs.¹²

This, combined with very hasty development, induced great tensions inside NCVQ as subject officials struggled to reconcile Capey's recommendations in new assessment specifications whilst countering teachers' 'initiative fatigue' (NCVQ official 8). New symbolism appears. Instead of missionary zeal and crusades, NCVQ officials use the political symbols of "*betrayal*", "*revisionism*", "*political pragmatism*", "*being under seige*", "*hawks and doves*". In contrast, the cool neutrality of "*reporting without fear or favour*", "*evidence-based interventions*" appear in OFSTED inspectors' and civil servants version of events. Presenting resistance from NCVQ officials as 'zealotry' or 'purism' only serves to reinforce the rationality of the side which sees itself as having the political upper hand.

It might be argued that external bodies did not recognise the problems NCVQ had in reconciling so many competing interests in one model. Yet some were unsympathetic:

there was a sense of mission [in NCVQ] and a sense of impatience with people who were questioning, or saying ..they couldn't understand....A certain amount of opposition was expected and ignored. Beyond that, people kept asking questions but they had to have it explained to them and after that, if you still asked questions, it was a case of 'whose side are you on?'. It felt to me that it was betrayal versus disagreement. Oddly, to the outside world, NCVQ was the controlling body but they saw themselves as fighting the Establishment and, ironically, FE was part of 'the establishment'! (external body official 2)

For one civil servant, the "*assessment technology*" and NCVQ's organisational *esprit de corps*, were:

a serious impediment to moving the policy on...debates were difficult because the language was awfully difficult..it was actually very difficult to get a consensus because the two sides of the argument were using completely different terms and language...there

¹² From a research team of six in 1992, there were over 80 GNVQ research and development officers in NCVQ by the time of its merger with SCAA in 1997. GNVQ developments are now diffused in the QCA with a dozen people working solely on GNVQs. Most ex-NCVQ officers now have a range of curriculum and qualification responsibilities and many have moved on from GNVQs.

was a sense in which you were not qualified to take part in the discussion unless you were steeped in that (civil servant 2)

Nonetheless, pressures on NCVQ made it increasingly difficult for some external actors in this study to criticise GNVQs either inside policy avenues such as the GPC, or publicly. Instead of perceived problems with an over-dogmatic or unaccountable NCVQ, external constituencies sympathetic to NCVQ's aims for distinctive assessment saw new 'enemies' in SCAA and OFSTED and amongst officials with direct access to Ministers.

c. Bewildered by confusion

There is a powerful, disconcerting sense in the interview data of people and organisations 'talking past each other' technically, epistemologically, and politically. Analysis shows that NCVQ's enthusiasm for a new assessment technology and the imperative of momentum were profoundly bewildering for the diverse constituencies trying to influence policy.

More substantial confusion was also evident. Sharp's account of the introduction of GNVQs shows that awarding bodies were confused by apparently contradictory instructions from the DfE 1991 to revamp the Diploma of Vocational Education (introduced in 1989 to replace the CPVE), and, simultaneously, to introduce the GNVQ (Sharp 1998). Interviews with external constituencies showed significant confusion over whether the then DfE had actually asked NCVQ to design a brand new qualification or merely instructed it to:

design the framework and the criteria for GNVQs and invite the awarding bodies to develop GNVQs which meet these criteria...it should be possible to make rapid progress towards modifying some existing qualifications to bring them into line with the new criteria very quickly, and accrediting them (Eggar 1991)

One explanation for discrepancy between Eggar's instruction and the NCVQ's ambitious initiative to actually design and specify the qualifications is the extent to which GNVQs generated such high hopes amongst diverse constituencies who all read their own aims into the initiative. Another interpretation was that Gilbert Jessup was determined to avoid

the compromises NCVQ had made in NVQs over 'conditional accreditation' of existing qualifications and filling gaps in provision (NCVQ officials 2, 5). According to NCVQ officials, what might seem as 'slippage' outside NCVQ was a conscious decision inside the GNVQ team. Nonetheless, different interpretations arise over whether Eggar agreed to this change and how far external constituencies knew about it. This led to confusion about the role of the GPC (external officials 1 and 2, OFSTED inspector 1 FEFC inspector). Some external officials argue that NCVQ lacked accountability, caused by its dual remits from the Employment Department which funded initial development and the DfE which initiated it.

Confusion over the ambitious remit adopted by NCVQ placed unfamiliar pressures on relationships and responsibilities between government departments, NCVQ as a regulatory or accrediting body and commercial awarding bodies:

[by 1992] the whole bandwagon was rolling. So the whole thing had shifted and ...I don't know why it happened or if DfEE officials knew about it, but we were no longer working to [Eggar's] briefing letter...NCVQ chose not to accept the role of regulatory body but instead chose to design a whole new qualification (GPC member/external body official 2)

Feelings of bewilderment (and also of being beleaguered) appear to encapsulate struggles to influence policy both inside the NCVQ itself and amongst external constituencies. Yet difficulties were not debated publicly, nor thrashed out between different constituencies. The momentum and impact of GNVQs compounded this, creating a form of defensiveness to external criticism inside the NCVQ:

It wasn't as if we were used to immediate and overnight success with NVQs...so it wasn't as if one expected to have this hugely popular award..it was good...because you felt that you were helping kids ...that weren't particularly motivated by the alternative routes. But I think it was scary and one started to feel responsible for those people...and suddenly to attract a lot of attention from the Department (Education) and the schools...there were a lot of clampdowns from then on (NCVQ official 1).

Difficulties for NCVQ in debating these issues were exacerbated by uncertain roles between government departments, NCVQ, the two inspectorates and awarding bodies, as

well as by the speed of development. These factors made it hard for external bodies to pay detailed attention to how NCVQ were interpreting their remit and made it easier for OFSTED and the DfE side of the newly formed DfEE to use its familiar channels of influence. In the GPC, for example, slippage is evident:

[the Policy Committee] began to set general criteria, then people were sent away to do an exemplar of what a programme meeting this criteria would look like and then slowly..people looked on exemplars as if they were proposals for a course but it had never quite been discussed in those terms...and when questioned, NCVQ would say 'well we're in a bit of a hurry' ¹³ ...After the election, we were getting huge amounts of paperwork before a meeting, full of detailed proposals..At that point, we were formally approving these programmes (external body official 2)

Some had difficulties in keeping track of decisions made by NCVQ officers (external official 1). There were also political uncertainties for the DfE in dealing with a quango used to operating in the very different cultures of the Employment Department (ED) and MSC. This resonates closely with the impact of different organisational cultures between the ED and DES, the MSC and LEAs in the TVEI (see Dale et al, 1989) and between the NCVQ and government departments and awarding bodies (Williams, 1999; Williams and Raggatt, 1999). Problems meant a new role for the DfE:

it was very tedious the number of consultation meetings and co-ordination meetings that you had to have with all sorts of different bodies...in this post-QCA world we really should not need to be, and should not be, nearly as hands-on as we had to be with NCVQ because...we spent an awful lot of time because we didn't have the same leverage with them as we did with other bodies (civil servant 3)

The ensuing 'turf wars' produced what one civil servant called a 'not invented here syndrome' amongst critics of GNVQs. This became increasingly difficult for the DfE to manage and one interpretation of the decision to merge the NCVQ with SCAA is that "we got fed up with the 'not invented here' going on all the time..."(civil servant 2)

¹³ The hurry refers to promises made about a new qualification in the election manifesto of 1992.

Conversely, NCVQ moved into unfamiliar territory dominated by *"the movers and the shakers in the education policy world"* (NCVQ official 6), namely SCAA, the DES/DfE and OFSTED. NCVQ officials found it hard to influence assessment policy and lobby for their case in these different cultures (NCVQ official 3), especially manoeuvring between the *"constant back-door stuff that went on"* (NCVQ official 5). An alien policy culture, with its own subtle, informal channels of communication, made it difficult to resist pressures for more traditional notions of reliability and to portray, instead, how NCVQ saw it being achieved:

perhaps what we didn't recognise was that the move from validity and the solid groundwork on content, to reliability¹⁴ had to be made fast, very fast (NCVQ official 6).

Debates about 'standards' were extremely fraught, particularly in the GPC, with fierce accusations that NCVQ officials *'did not care about standards'* (external official 2, NCVQ officials 2, 1, 5, 6).

There are also interesting perceptions about different styles of influence used by the FEFC inspectorate and OFSTED, again arising over different ideas about what 'standards' signify and over the best way to bring about change in a controversial qualification. OFSTED's statutory role gives them a direct line to Ministers, and this was resented by the vocational side of the standards' argument. The following parody of OFSTED's influence illuminates the political and populist sway that the traditional view holds:

When NCVQ talked about 'standards', they meant standards that had been validated by the awarding body and the concerns are whether they are being validly assessed....OFSTED used ordinary language; 'it's inconsistent Minister, we could show you two pieces of work, both of which have been passed at very different standards' – they switched the meaning of it (external official 2/GPC member).

¹⁴ Please refer to footnote earlier in this chapter on ways of securing reliability.

In contrast, the FEFC inspectorate had more affinity in the early days of GNVQs with NCVQ's notion of standards which fitted with their own experience of teaching vocational courses in FE). Inspectors were also conscious that, in contrast to schools, FE had experienced a long series of vocational initiatives and was also experiencing major restructuring discussed in Chapter Two which coincided with the introduction of GNVQs (FEFC inspector 3). They believed that GNVQ had to be given the chance to 'bed down' and become established. The chief executive of NCVQ between 1992 and 1997 described their more supportive approach:

Terry [Melia, FEFC chief inspector] always said 'I know what I'm looking at, I'm looking at something that is developing very rapidly and therefore dramatising its failures isn't going to do anybody any good'...I remember having a marvellous interview with him on the 'Today' programme when the first FEFC report on GNVQs came out... and Sue MacGregor said 'now Mr Melia, I understand that your report has revealed grave problems about the GNVQ'...Terry was actually on the 'phone, he wasn't in the studio, and he said 'No it hasn't, the GNVQ is doing very well'...she didn't know what to do and so we ended up with a good sort of advertisement for the GNVQ.

Despite the 'heroic rebel' symbolism of this example, it illustrates a very different perception about how to influence policy debates than accounts above by civil servants and OFSTED inspectors. FEFC believed that criticising a new vocational qualification would undermine its precarious public status and wanted to play down what it saw as 'teething problems' (FEFC inspector). In contrast, OFSTED had 'the ear of Ministers' and access to the 'cocktail parties and networks' that some NCVQ officials saw as the real arenas of decision-making (NCVQ official 6). Policy-based actors from assessment traditions therefore moved into processes and cultures familiar with assessment in academic qualifications. A sense of cultural and political alienation is reflected by a view from one senior NCVQ official who points out that: *"the DES would never have hired someone like me. Never in a million years"*.

In addition, GNVQ assessment required individuals in government departments, the inspectorates, external constituencies such as FEU/FEDA and awarding bodies to develop new levels of conceptual, technical and political understanding of assessment principles. One effect was that individuals were expected to represent an official policy

position for their organisation in fraught, unfamiliar debates inside or on the periphery of an alien policy culture.

Perhaps as a counter to this bewilderment, GNVQ developments have set precedents for high levels of political intervention and new powers for QCA as a regulatory body. One civil servant believes that stronger control by the DFEE is now based on more robust specialist knowledge and understanding about assessment amongst civil servants and Ministers:

I think it was the DfE that really made the difference because people like [name of civil servant 3] were instrumental in this and developed a lot of internal expertise...when I first started on qualifications stuff way back in the 80s, civil servants were simply not expected to understand anything. We just got expertise from outside. We realised that you couldn't deal with the issues [in GNVQs] unless we had a lot of internal expertise..Tim Boswell developed a lot of knowledge and understanding and was able to challenge...he was very assiduous and asked very penetrating questions¹⁵ (civil servant 2)

New expertise allowed the DfE to effect changes in GNVQs by transferring actors to other parts of the policy process, such as the appointment (in 1994) of a civil servant from GNVQ policy to run the FEU. He argued that what appeared to be mere technical issues were, in fact, "*policy-laden*", enabling him to "*work behind the scenes*" by placing certain individuals in development groups. An alternative interpretation was that '*inappropriate*' attention by DfE civil servants to the minutiae of assessment in GNVQs meant that they did not control how NCVQ changed the remit it had been given (external official 1). This interpretation of the changing role of civil servants may resonate with a more general shift from being impartial advisers to more 'hands-on' promoters of government policy (see Whitty and Edwards, 1994).¹⁶

Although some constituencies were therefore bothered by a maelstrom they had not anticipated, and bewildered by unfamiliar policy processes and debates, it seems that

¹⁵ My interview with Tim Boswell was surprising for his detailed technical insight and enthusiasm for the complex issues raised by outcome-based assessment in GNVQs.

¹⁶ This would be an important focus for a further analysis of how the impact of key initiatives have affected the roles of educational civil servants.

many policy-makers take a fairly sanguine view of any ensuing chaos and compromise. As one OFSTED inspector pointed out, *“that, sadly, is the British way of doing things”*. The apparent irrationality and messiness of ‘policy on the hoof’ becomes neutral and rational:

I think if I'm honest, [the problems] could have been predicted...people worry about the classification of the upper secondary and tertiary education system and to some extent, the assessment model is only a proxy for that debate (Tim Boswell)

we were working to a pretty tight timescale, for perfectly reasonable policy reasons ...everyone learned as we went along...the outcome of Capey was entirely predictable, I think the themes of Capey you could map all the way back, more or less, to the beginning, just a culmination of all that (civil servant 2).

2. CONSTRUCTIONS OF AUTONOMY AND MOTIVATION IN GNVQ ASSESSMENT POLICY

Despite the pivotal aims of autonomy and motivation that underpinned the vision for GNVQ’s particular approach to assessment, these were not closely articulated either inside the NCVQ, nor externally through early publicity conferences for GNVQ and the guidance to teachers discussed in Chapters One and Three. When asked directly whether the aim of using assessment to develop autonomy and motivation was discussed or communicated, both inside policy and to external constituencies, every interviewee believed that it was left implicit. Data show that this enabled different meanings of autonomy to be loaded with negative or positive implications, depending where different constituencies stood in the ‘standards’ debate discussed above.

Discussion above of normative themes amongst the original team of NVQ designers shows that ‘autonomy’ was a mix of aims for empowering young adults to decide when they are ready to present evidence for assessment and having a genuine say in content and process:

...the whole idea of the student accumulating evidence towards a portfolio and being able to say 'I've got it together and I'm now ready to be assessed'. So that they take the time

they need and they determine when they think they've got the right quality and..have the option also to go back and say 'I want to improve, can I do this again?'...We didn't say it was a free-for-all and the students are in charge...it wasn't a case of autonomy or independence running mad but it was saying...for young adults, they may have very valid reasons for saying 'I can't do it this week, can I do it next week'... (NCVQ official 6).

There was also enthusiasm for the idea that OBA might also offer teachers more autonomy in designing locally-appropriate assignments to motivate students:

I remember making lots of speeches about how we were liberating teachers from the tyranny of curriculum and syllabus by saying we specify the outcome and you decide what it is people need to do in order to get there. You decide how much you need to teach them, how much they can learn for themselves and you decide on the route they are going to take. You've got to decide on the basis of each individual in each group of students and you are constrained by the economics and all the other things that constrain you but that's your job, that's what being a professional teacher is. They used to cheer 'that's wonderful stuff'. Whether anybody could actually do that I don't know, but that's the theory (NCVQ official 5).

There were also aims amongst some designers for autonomy as an entitlement to equal access to worthwhile certification, built both through political recognition of parity of esteem but also through assessment processes that inspire learners' confidence so that they want to achieve all the outcomes. This is a meritocratic view of autonomy:

If you judge people on how well they meet a series of outcomes regardless of how they got there, that is really important for enabling open access and things...I've thought a lot about outcomes and I thought about them in terms of people internalising, seeing what they needed for an outcome, and then trying to match that to their own feelings of how they were doing....But when you get working with the outcome in one hand and the learner's own perception on the other, with no intermediary, it can be a big problem (NCVQ official 1).

The last part of this quote indicates more caution than Gilbert Jessup's radical view that access to assessment outcome and criteria empower students to be the lever for pedagogic change, through bypassing the mediocre, uninspiring teachers he sees as barriers to learning:

One can't have this great faith in teachers. They aren't going to change overnight to become inspirational. Improve teachers by all means but there must be other means (interview, March 1998).

Autonomy is therefore associated with independence from institutional timetables and from teachers' idiosyncratic and perhaps lacklustre approaches. From these perspectives, self-regulation of procedures precedes engagement with subject content and builds from initial motivation of choice over relevant, authentic learning activities and an absence of artificial, invalid external testing. In a naturalistic view of learning, students evolve autonomy through gaining generic skills in planning, management of work and evaluation. 'Active' learning through real life projects encourages intrinsic motivation and engagement with subject content. The early grading criteria rewarded action planning, managing and evaluating assignments and were seen to encourage the "*student's ability to use his or her own resources to solve a problem*" (NCVQ official 4) and "*to go away and do projects and think things through for themselves a lot more*" (NCVQ official 8).

Dissension emerged later within the NCVQ over the extent to which specifications of outcomes alone could empower learners. There were also concerns about whether having to account for one's autonomy through the grading criteria became merely a bolted-on, 'false' and demotivating autonomy (NCVQ official 5). Yet, as one NCVQ subject officer points out, there was no overt discussion, even in the subject groups, about the link between generic research skills and subject content:

I don't think people ever discussed it, I didn't come across that type of debate at all...we were thinking of people's research skills...an emphasis on autonomy through depth of subject matter was never an issue in any of the meetings I was at (NCVQ official 8).

Thus, Gilbert Jessup believed that grading themes would integrate organically with activities and flexible treatment of subject content in order to create potential evidence for grading. Nevertheless, criticism from FEFC and OFSTED showed that, in reality, teachers and students treated all the different dimensions atomistically and this led to an

over-burdened system supported by checklists. Criticism of over-load was confirmed in a report by Wolf et al (1994) for the ED.

One effect of a generic view of autonomy was that GNVQs became vulnerable to criticism of 'poor standards' where students accumulated evidence mechanistically, without gaining autonomy within a cognitive base of a subject. A foundation of knowledge and skills within which to apply generic research skills was therefore missing:

When you say 'fostering autonomy', that in itself is no good at all. What does autonomy mean in isolation? It is also about applying it, it's to do with styles of learning and giving a young person greater responsibility, if you like, but it also has to achieve something, and our concern in the early days of GNVQs was that actually achieving some kind of knowledge, as well as vague ideas of competence (OFSTED inspector 2).

We were concerned [about] what is the subject matter? What is the knowledge element in this, because we always felt that there was something missing in GNVQs (civil servant 2).

As Section One shows, this subject-based, cognitive notion of autonomy became a source of profound disagreement over what was meant by 'standards': OFSTED saw standards as differentiated levels of knowledge and skills, drawing from clear foundations and hierarchies of subject knowledge. For them, parity of esteem would only arise if GNVQs showed the public that they had this foundation: otherwise, the quality of students' work would always be seen as inferior to A-levels. This view was powerfully illustrated by the way that critics used questions from external tests in GNVQs to raise concerns with ministers and through the media about rigour. In the light of the typology developed in Chapter Three, these critics saw procedural and personal autonomy as poor substitutes for critical autonomy based on a command of subject knowledge.

Other disagreements over autonomy arose over perceptions that an outcome-based view of procedural autonomy was unrealistic, even undesirable, in the everyday reality of education institutions:

You need to promote as much flexibility as you can, or as near as you can get to it, yet people nevertheless do adopt certain kinds of pathways, there are certain standard kind

of packages...in terms of allocating resources... I always felt.. that total autonomy, learning autonomy, was an unrealisable goal...because you are trading off things that are of great value like coherence, programme or peer group support. The kind of nightmare scenario of each individual pursuing a slightly different programme and having to access support in a slightly different way, just didn't seem to ring true (civil servant 2).

In this quote, autonomy has slipped to individual freedom of choice over options and pathways. In divisions over 'standards', normative themes of autonomy and motivation in learning coalesce around three discernible ideological standpoints¹⁷:

- *'cultural restorationism'* implicit in traditional notions of standards, heirarchical achievement within discernible subjects and policy processes associated with "*the way we do things*" (OFSTED inspector)
- *'liberal humanism'* associated with progressive, student-centred approaches, access for disadvantaged learners
- *'vocational modernism'*, associated with a meritocratic rather than norm-referenced view of standards, and frustration with established 'ways of doing things', whether in college (and school) procedures and cultures or policy processes.

In the data, the second and third standpoints, evident amongst the 'vocational side of the divide' (including the civil servant from the ED) show more intense normative themes and more personal investment of individual visions or a championing of 'an FE ethos'. In contrast, OFSTED inspectors, DfE civil servants, those still with incumbent senior roles in QCA and the development of GNVQs, or who were more distant from the original vision, are much cooler and more politically adept at being 'neutral'.

As Chapter Four argued, the gaps in what people say are as important as what they do say. Thus, until asked directly during interviews, each 'side' referred only to one type of

¹⁷ For discussion of ideological standpoints in education policy see Ball (1990) and for application of these to NCVQ's aims for competence-based assessment, see Hickox and Moore (1995).

autonomy: NCVQ, awarding body and FEU officials and the FEFC inspector, for example, never mentioned cognitive depth or subject-related autonomy. Conversely, OFSTED and DfEE civil servants never mentioned vocational relevance, personal development or generic learning processes.

Analysis of how competing visions for GNVQs transmogrified into a politically acceptable model shows that normative themes in the data dissolve rapidly into organisational ones under the pressure of devising the assessment 'technology' of the specifications, then into political conflict over reliability and 'rigour'. In coding and analysing data, a focus on the period after the formation of the QCA shows how different constituencies rationalise, retrospectively, the sequence of events, their consequences and the personal performances of individuals. An apparent chronology of events, pivotal decisions and influential individuals symbolised a rational reconciliation of political and organisational conflict. Yet, the use of organisational, normative and symbolic perspectives in policy analysis reveals the mayhem underneath.

There is not enough space here to account in detail to explore 'narratives' in different interviews (see Ball, 1994 for an example). Nevertheless, recognising symbolic and discursive dimensions helps to combat naïve realism. A couple of examples are used here. Interviewees adopted different styles, partly reflecting positions or status and defended their roles in overt or subtle ways. John Capey was the 'realistic hero', rescuing a mess: by associating himself in a broker role with 'Saint' Ron Dearing who was carrying out his review of 16-19 qualifications, he added status to his own review whilst maintaining his independence from Dearing's. The ex-chief executive of NCVQ had a more personal style, with many first names and anecdotes and a cheerful, even cavalier, disdain for traditional policy-making processes once NCVQ became embroiled in the 'education world'. The current head of GNVQ policy presented an articulate, rational exposition of the official policy position on GNVQs in the new framework without any reference at all to his own goals, or to personalities, difficulties or conflict: for him, the assessment model was now a 'sensible' reconciliation of different assessment principles. Gilbert Jessup's vision for an outcome-based model was compelling and self-

assured, tinged with disappointment that the 'education world' had failed to grasp its implications. Tim Boswell's interview was surprising both for the level of detailed technical insights into the implications of the model itself and the liberal humanism of his beliefs about the vocational curriculum. Lastly, one of the NCVQ officials who had written most of the 1993-1995 model retained her enthusiastic vision for OBA with no mention at all of her own intensive contributions to its implementation. The last example shows the contrast between the 'obvious' policy-based actors and the invisible ones behind the scenes, and the corresponding need for policy analysis to encompass a diverse range of constituencies. It is important to point out that she was one of only four female interviewees, none of whom claimed an important role. Instead, any accounts of action and dynamism came from male policy-makers.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF GNVQ DEVELOPMENT FOR ASSESSMENT POLICY

This chapter has shown that GNVQs illustrate long-running tensions in education politics in the UK, particularly over what is meant by 'standards'. A central theme in analysis above is that two contradictory notions of 'standards' continue to slide past each other in policy debates. One measures achievement as 'reliability' in performance and consistency of demands made on candidates in different years and in different subjects. This norm-referenced assessment underpins the public image of A-levels as a 'gold standard' (see DfEE, 1996), the positioning of FE and sixth form colleges in league tables of results and the recent claim that overall achievement in Advanced GNVQ is 'now the same' as in A-levels (DfEE, 2000). In contrast, a series of piecemeal initiatives in the general vocational curriculum culminated in GNVQs as the first mainstream attempt to define 'standards' as 100% achievement of pre-specified, precisely defined outcomes assessed against valid, authentic and public criteria. This definition allows all candidates to achieve the highest grade if they meet all the criteria.¹⁸

Analysis of GNVQ developments shows, therefore, that disjuncture between these two meanings of 'standards' is partly an epistemological disagreement over whether

assessment should be a norm-referenced measure of consistency of achievement or a criterion-referenced measure of validity. But it is also an ideological disagreement about which type of assessment should have higher social status (see Young, 1998). The resulting 'fault line' "*bedevils our qualifications*" (Stanton, 1998, p50), producing assessment policy which panders to, and fuels, the annual media hysteria around A-level and GCSE results whilst simultaneously setting 'tougher' targets to motivate more people to achieve formal qualifications. When these tensions became embroiled in GNVQs through the "*messy realities of influence, pressure, dogma, expediency, conflict, compromise, intransigence, resistance, error, opposition and pragmatism*" that characterise education policy in the UK (Ball, 1990, p9), they created passionate political and organisational commitments. In this context, debates about what constitutes an desirable equilibrium between validity and reliability in qualifications at different levels remain fraught and politically-laden.

There are also questions about how far vision, enthusiasm and a willingness to take risks led to unacceptable policy slippages, an unprecedented degree of chaotic development and extreme organisational rivalry and mistrust. One argument is that, despite these problems, and without an imperative for momentum (see also Oates, 2000), "*the blasted thing would never have got off the runway*" as Tim Boswell graphically put it! It is difficult to evaluate how far to hold NCVQ responsible for slippage, turf wars and the messy processes of creating the GNVQ assessment model. Although there are criticisms in the data of 'power without responsibility', one civil servant argued that demands on NCVQ to keep bolting on different elements of assessment in order to satisfy political imperatives for credibility was a mistake for which "*we all have to take responsibility*" (civil servant 2).

Political factors therefore undermined certain aims for autonomy and motivation in the first model and replaced them with others. Inside NCVQ, technical processes of writing specifications unearthed competing views about desirable learning activities and different

¹⁸ An interesting indication of a move away from this is that the proportion of Advanced GNVQ candidates gaining Distinctions is never more than 28% in any subject (Ecclestone and Hall, 2000).

expectations about the 'type of student' GNVQs would attract. Using the typology developed in Chapter Three, it can be argued that the most explicitly articulated ideas about autonomy in the GNVQ assessment model came from Gilbert Jessup and the first team of designers, supported, in principle, by the FEU and the FEFC inspectorate. The typology enables implicit aims to be characterised as *identified*, *intrinsic* and *interested* motivation through clear outcomes, locally-relevant learning activities and parity of esteem for portfolio-based evidence of achievement. Potentially, all students could achieve the highest grades. Yet, official guidance presented implicit and vague ideas about procedural autonomy and 'efficient' use of institutional resources.

In contrast, constituencies from the 'academic' side emphasised subject-based critical autonomy as a cognitive skill, given status through reliable 'standards' of grading associated with a small proportion of Distinction grades. Yet, given the importance that GNVQ designers attached to the radical implications of their assessment principles, discussion of motivation and autonomy was not communicated and defended publicly or inside the difficult policy processes examined here.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DOING IT THEIR WAY: STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO ASSESSMENT IN GNVQs

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores views amongst students about the effects of GNVQ assessment on their autonomy and motivation. Analysis focuses on eighteen individual students selected by their teachers as autonomous and motivated. I coded and analysed interview data, observation and fieldwork notes and analytical memos by college, course and year, then by individual students, and last by six 'black swans' (Michael, Britney, Louise, Darren, Annette and Jacqui) who showed deeper forms of autonomy than the others¹. I also draw on findings from a questionnaire given to 70 students from the four courses in my study and completed by 80% (62) students from the four groups covered by this study. 57% of the respondents were at Bridgeview College and 43% at Riverside College, while 60% were taking the Business GNVQ and 39% taking HSC. 44% were in Year 1 and 45% in Year 2.

A copy of this chapter, together with a summary of conclusions was sent to teachers and students. Findings were also discussed at a seminar with the nine teachers in the study and at a seminar with a broader audience of GNVQ teachers in one of the study sites.

Section One analyses students' goals for motivation, the actions they take to achieve these goals and the conditions that affect goals and actions.

Section Two analyses students' goals for autonomy, the actions they take to achieve these goals and the conditions that affect goals and actions.

¹ Please see Appendix 16..for details of analytical categories.

Section Three evaluates the effects of GNVQ assessment on students’ motivation and autonomy.

The implications of findings analysed and evaluated here are drawn out as conclusions in Chapter Nine.

1. SUSTAINING MOTIVATION

a. Goals for progress

The questionnaire and fieldwork data show that the range of extrinsic and intrinsic factors outlined in Chapter Three affected students’ motivation. As discussion below shows, types of motivation fluctuated over the two years. Students were asked in the questionnaire to pick the ‘2 most important reasons for doing GNVQ’. 77.4% saw *gaining the qualification* as the most important reason for doing a GNVQ. 72.6% also said *subject content* was important and 24.2% added ‘*college atmosphere and social life*’. Reasons that students added for themselves included ‘*spreading the workload over the year*’. The questionnaire also showed that 45.6% see vocational courses in local universities as a realistic destination (see Table 1). Figures from the QCA (see Ecclestone and Hall, 2000) show that nationally, 54% see HE as a realistic destination.²

Table 2. Planned destination after GNVQ

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Try for university	26	41.9	40.4
Job linked to GNVQ	23	37.1	40.4
Job not linked to GNVQ	1	1.6	1.8
Another college course	5	8.1	8.8
Other	2	3.2	3.5
Total	57	91.9	100.0
System missing	5	8.1	

² Progression from GNVQ to HE was discussed in Chapter One. Lower participation rates in education in the north-east may be a partial reason for differences between expectations amongst the sample and QCA figures (see also Chapter Five).

However, in the light of discussion below about fluctuations in motivation, Year 2 students were more likely to say they were doing the GNVQ for the qualification.

Similarly, in the fieldwork sample, students chose a GNVQ because it is a 'good qualification' with progression to higher education, it has a vocational, 'real life' emphasis and uses continuous assessment³. None saw themselves as 'A-level' students, particularly those who progressed from Intermediate GNVQ. They saw GNVQ as 'different' and for 14 of the 18, a 'second chance' to overcome past low achievement. A view that good qualifications are essential for employment enabled most students to sustain an end goal during their GNVQ, despite setbacks discussed below.

Yet *intrinsic* and *interested* forms of motivation were also important. A striking feature throughout the fieldwork was students' high levels of engagement with the course, its teachers and the content of units. They all aimed to produce good work and were overtly enthusiastic about the intrinsic interest of particular topics. The comment below is typical:

I did an assignment in the first week. My boyfriend was on backshift so I just did it for 12 hours a day and I just kept on doing it because I got stuck right into it...about hospitals in the 1840s and about the anaesthetics they had to use, and you just can't believe what it was like in those days (Jane, HSC Year 2, Bridgeview).

Engagement was signalled during visits to colleges when, in contrast to their less motivated peers, students frequently carried textbooks and files of work and sometimes swapped books, passed on useful material or talked about work informally with friends. Enthusiasm and pride in their work seemed crucial to their self-image: they 'loved' being a student, they 'loved the assignments', the teachers were 'great'. They compared

³ These reasons parallel those given by 900 GNVQ students surveyed by the QCA (Ecclestone and Hall, 2000).

themselves to other students and equated maturity with confidence in GNVQ assessment procedures, being well-organised and having good relationships with teachers.

In the light of the typology, there was strong evidence of *introjected* motivation: students internalised the external framework that the assessment procedures provided. All showed *identified* motivation, seeing less enjoyable activities as a means to an end. But three students said they were motivated predominantly by *intrinsic* challenges in assignments and the *interested* motivation of overcoming difficulties and gaining new ideas. For example :

John's [unit] has been the best one. A lot of people have found it hard and it is but I think it is the case of being challenging. It's a lot more challenging when you have to go out and find information...It was 'Business in the Economy', about supply and demand and stuff like that. It was pretty cool and I really enjoyed it. You had to do different graphs and stuff and it was all about theories and there was argumentative type passages as well. There was no right or wrong answer, it's a case of your... theme and your...explanation of the matter (Darren, Year 1 BS, Riverside)

Despite some evidence of *intrinsic* and *interested* motivation, *introjected* and *identified* factors dominated attitudes. Students had strong views, for example, about relevance and usefulness. The questionnaire sample was asked the open-ended question 'Please say the main thing which you can do now which you couldn't do when you started GNVQ':

Table 3. Things I can do now...

Good IT skills	22%
Course-specific knowledge	16%
Write a good assignment	15%

Students were also asked to select from a list of skills or attributes they believed GNVQs encouraged:

Table 4. GNVQ has made me more able to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Know my strengths and weaknesses	14	22.6	28.0
Know what subject interests me most	10	16.1	20.0
Set my own targets for learning	9	14.5	18.0
Set my own targets for life outside college	7	11.3	14.0
More analytical about subjects on the course	5	8.1	10.0
More confident about subjects on the course	3	4.8	6.0
Other	2	3.2	4.0
System missing	12	19.4	

Such responses support an early goal of GNVQ designers, namely that teachers and students could design assignments for ‘real life’ local contexts and interests. In parallel to the questionnaire sample, students in the college fieldwork saw the variety of units, links to the ‘real world’ and opportunities to develop subject interests as important. This view indicated potential for students to develop *intrinsic* and *interested* motivation.

However, notions of ‘useful’ learning varied between courses and individuals. In the questionnaire, more Business students saw ‘the qualification’ and ‘interesting subjects’ as more important than did HSC students. Business students in the fieldwork liked assignments to be relevant to people and organisations in ‘the real world’ and to their future and current jobs.

In contrast, the young women on the two HSC courses applied assignments on health, psychology and mental illness, child abuse and family problems to understand aspects of their own lives. In one college, the set assignment for Psychology was especially relevant:

The case studies [for a psychology assignment] had to be 'chosen care settings'⁴, not real ones. So I did one fictional one, right, and then I did me for the other one. Because I know loads about myself and I'm getting counselling, so that's a care setting... So I used extracts from my diary and analysed them and I highlighted different parts of the extracts which I thought were significant...(Annette, HSC, Year 1, Riverside).

I have done my case study on [my sister] and I am well into that because I have lived with [sister's condition] practically all my life...You have to do all the different approaches and I have worked out how to link my sister to those approaches by what the psychologists would say...I used to want to be a child psychologist but after seeing it in real life, it's just not worth it because they are not very good (Britney, HSC Year 1, Riverside).

Ideas about relevance changed once students moved from GNVQ into work. For Kevin and Lynda, although subject knowledge, becoming organised and being confident were important for their new jobs (Kevin as trainee manager in a furniture store, Lynda as a care assistant in an old people's home), the most transferable aspect was that GNVQ assessment created the necessary *introjected* and *identified* motivation for accepting accountability⁵. As trainee manager, Kevin pointed out:

They [GNVQ] would always ask you why you had done something. The way we have been training at work is that you always have to give reasons for doing anything. So if somebody phones up from Head Office and says 'why haven't you done this' and you haven't got a reason for it, that is when they get annoyed (Kevin, BS, Riverside).

More specifically, he recognised instantly a new NVQ being introduced for staff training:

I just knew straight away because it's the same set-up and specification...the assessor didn't have to explain a thing: I just said 'I know what I have to do'.

More subtle social dimensions to *identified* and *intrinsic* motivation also emerged. Students enjoyed the security of the GNVQ group and navigated between their own goals, the demands of the GNVQ assessment system and good relationships with peers

⁴ 'Chosen care settings' is the precise phrase from the assignment brief for the QCA set assignment discussed in Chapter Three as an example of assessment specifications.

⁵ This accountability is discussed by Bates in her analysis of links between GNVQs and new forms of human resource management (1998a) (see also discussion in Chapter Three).

and teachers. Although they were disdainful of other students' lack of engagement with the course, they maintained good social relationships with them. For confident students, an image of being motivated, being popular with peers, getting good marks were, far from being 'uncool' as I'd asked, all strong assets:

I play off it actually... You know Rick and Tim come in and say, 'Darren, how well have you done' and I say, 'well, I've done the whole assignment and I've just got to type it up'....They say 'oh you've done that'. I like to go out and help them... and I think that's a major plus point. Like today, I was helping John and it was, like, all rolling off the top of my head and I've only basically learnt it this year but I say 'well you want to do it this way and that way' and I think 'like, how do I know all this'? ... (Darren BS, Year1, Riverside)

The most confident students managed being seen as a 'swot' by mixing friendships with motivated and less motivated peers:

They all call me a swot, because I always bring my assignments in. They call me the posh one from Hexham because they're all really rough and geordie. But they joke and we're all really good friends... they know I want to do well and they are not bothered. They are open about it and we are not horrible to each other about it...Even though some of them can't be bothered, they will sit and talk among themselves and I will just get on and they know that I want to get on so they just leave me. (Britney, HSC Year1, Riverside).

For some students, confidence did not emerge until year 2. In Annette's case, familiarity with the specifications, and her growing realisation that college gave her space to 'be herself', enabled her to find a new status with peers. In year 2, she began to gain Distinctions. Others found the tension between peer approval and doing well harder to negotiate:

You like to get on with your friends but you also want to do the work so it's trying to find the right balance between the two. I don't think you can find the right balance (Stephen, BS Year2, Bridgeview).

Group motivation and social commitments were therefore important:

the group's really come together since the beginning; we all help each other, everyone helps everyone else (Louise, BS Year1, Riverside).

There seemed to be stronger social commitment in Bridgeview groups than at Riverside where poor attendance and declining involvement in group projects in year 2 eroded social motivation amongst students in the sample. Despite fluctuations in social commitment, all but two said they cared about their peers' achievement. In contrast to teachers' view that comparing work meant copying, some compared grades to set new targets:

you feel that if they got that grade you could have got that grade too...David got a distinction on his assignment and I got a pass and I think I could have done the same and got a distinction so next time I'll work harder and I might get it (Stephen, BS Year 1, Bridgeview)

However, lack of resentment seemed to depend on good relationships within the group and there was more resentment when some students gained good grades in the two fragmented groups at Riverside than in others.

Another dimension to social motivation was that students sought 'people like them' to work with. The 'black swans' were strategic and confident about relationships within the group and with teachers, and saw the importance of both. As Michael progressed from GNVQ to the first year of a degree, social motivation became paramount. Away from "the totally cosy" GNVQ group, he found new peers to ease the transition to an unfamiliar community where he had to learn new rules for engaging with teachers and assessed work and where there were no assessment specifications to help him work out the rules. He had developed a strategy from his school experience:

K: In terms of being a student, and the group you're in, is there a pressure on you not to be a 'good' student, to be a cool and laid-back student?

M: Sometimes but not really the close group I'm in. It's those particular people outside the group but that was the same as some people on the GNVQ. Luckily, the people I know work hard...it's just like at school, all my friends were in the high groups and my aim is to keep in with the higher groups. This happened to my sister and she happened to go for the lower groups and she hasn't got as far as I did

For all eighteen students, other dimensions of identified and intrinsic motivation appeared in support from parents and external contacts.⁶ However, only six drew on family and work colleagues for specialist help with assignments. One black swan discussed his work with others:

I work on a part-time basis and a lot of the contract lads who work part-time are at college or in education so we all confer on breaks and lunchtimes (Darren, BS Year2, Riverside)

Some students received more general support:

My manager at work motivates me a lot. If he knows I have homework, he will sit me down at one of the tables in the corner and make me do it (Tracey, BS Year2, Bridgeview).

For others, though, lack of knowledge amongst supportive families created another impetus to be independent:

It makes me more independent and motivated to do more work because my mam and dad don't know anything about what I'm doing and I can't ask them...most of my family don't know what I'm doing either so I've got to do it myself (Naomi, Year2 BS, Riverside).

Access to the assessment specifications also met different social needs. For some students, seeking a good relationship with teachers arose from lack of confidence with peers. Karen, for example, used the assessment criteria for communicating with teachers

⁶ My study offers fleeting insights about students' cultural capital inside and outside the course but does not explore these in-depth. An ESRC study of independence and the development of cultural capital in

that, given her lack of confidence, would be difficult otherwise. Unlike the rest of my sample, she had no clear end goal beyond the course. Nor was she wildly enthusiastic about the content ⁷. She works hard for assignments but needs feedback from teachers in numerous attempts to improve them. For her, the specifications "*make the teachers talk to you more, not just give the lesson*": she is less concerned about the attitudes of other students than working with teachers to improve her understanding of the criteria.

b. Actions to maintain and enhance motivation

Despite their obvious engagement, *introjected* motivation led all eighteen students in the qualitative sample to use the specifications to try to judge how hard to work for each assignment as it appeared. Twelve students fell into the 65% of the questionnaire sample that 'never' or 'sometimes' aimed for Distinctions. Apart from the black swans, students played safe when aiming for grades and were cheerfully instrumental about doing less well for units or teachers they do not like or aiming high in 'easy' units, and low in 'hard' ones. The language of 'hard', 'easy', 'horrible', 'boring', 'interesting', 'irrelevant', 'uncomfortable', permeated students' appraisals of assignment requirements.

A careful strategy allowed some, like Michael, to coast towards the end by aiming for Passes or Merits because, mid-way through year 2, he had the overall Distinction grade needed for university. Apart from six who always aimed for Distinctions, motivation for less confident students was affected strongly by their judgements about unit content and of their own strengths and weaknesses. Motivation seemed to derive from security within a comfort zone of realistic achievement rather than challenge. Again, these comments are typical:

GNVQs, A-levels and training schemes evaluates this crucial dimension to autonomy in formal learning programmes (Bates and Allatt, in progress).

⁷ It is important to acknowledge limits to validity in a retrospective approach to eliciting accounts of people's dispositions, approaches to learning and the competences and attributes they believe they develop. Eraut (1999) argues that researchers need to observe everyday practices for prolonged periods in order to get a more realistic account. This methodological problem is compounded by the effect on young people, especially those who be unconfident, of long tape recorded interviews and questions they do not 'own'. It is therefore acutely uncomfortable for me to reduce an individual's complex perspectives and personality to simple illustrations of a wider point (see Knight and Saunders, 1999).

Basically last year I only got a few merits and mostly passes. I thought I will just aim for the merit rather than aiming too high and being disappointed (Wendy, Bridgeview BS)

I always go for a Pass. I get the Pass out of the way and then I say 'did I find that easy or did I find that hard'? If I found it really hard, I probably just stick at a pass whereas if I find it easy or interesting enough, I think 'I might as well go on and try and see if I can get anything higher' (Annastasia, HSC Year2, Riverside).

After a few months of doing it, you realise these can be your strengths and weaknesses (Kevin, BS Year 2 Riverside).

Yet, this strategy could backfire and Kevin, using the 1995 model, interpreted his performance wrongly:

... I ended up after all that with just getting a merit...It was because of the way they assess it and... the information gathering and the problem handling and all that sort of thing... You have to fill up four blocks [the grading theme boxes on the feedback sheet used in the college] and I had three of them filled up completely with four distinctions in each and the other one I had two so I was just two short on that....By the end of the first year, teachers were saying to me 'you're pretty much guaranteed a distinction' and I thought I did keep going, but obviously I tripped up along the way..(Kevin, Year 2 BS, Riverside)

c. Conditions affecting motivation

Like any students, the students in this study fitted the demands of the course strategically around diverse commitments such as part-time jobs, a social life, relationships and doing other part-time qualifications, such as information processing. The questionnaire sample was asked to identify the 'two most important things that get in the way of your motivation to do your best work on the GNVQ?':

Table 5. What gets in the way of your motivation to do your best work in the GNVQ?

	N	Mean	SD
Social life	36	.83	.38
Too much workload in GNVQ	35	.97	.17
Work commitments	25	1.00	.00
Family commitments	20	.70	.47
Boring work in GNVQ	17	.71	.47
Getting good grades is too hard	13	.54	.52

Bearing in mind the number of responses and the mean values, the most common obstacles were the heavy workload, work commitments and social life. This is an important caveat in evaluating what students say about their motivation since the study showed that they have strong views about what constitutes an ‘acceptable’ work load. 16 of 18 in the fieldwork sample had part-time jobs and four worked three full days a week, eroding a supposedly full-time course:

I used to do four days of work and three days here...I still do my three days and I only do three days at Thorntons because I told them I had to do an extra day at college. And they said ‘well you can work in the afternoon can’t you’ and I said ‘I cannot’. So I get my Thursdays off now so I can try and get my work done (Annastasia HSC Year 2, Riverside).

Other research (Davies, 2000) confirms the extent to which post-16 students expect to work large numbers of hours alongside their courses. GNVQ students in the study decided when to attend college and when to work at home or in the college’s Independent Learning Centre and, in 15-hours per week formal contact, attendance appeared to be very variable, even in ‘popular’ lessons. Of eleven observed lessons, all seen half-way through terms⁸, only two had the whole group present and the other eight had less than

⁸ Timing of research is an important variable. In this case, attendance was poorer at the end of terms or on Mondays and Fridays! Nevertheless, it is important not to over-generalise about poor or good attendance. More broadly, timing raises a methodological issue discussed by Ball (1996) who argues that qualitative researchers often fail to acknowledge how time of year, day or week affect participants’ feelings and

50% attendance. As four students in Riverside college pointed out, lessons were sometimes cancelled by teachers and poor attendance undermined motivation. In contrast, during my visits to colleges, Learning Centres were busy with students from different courses, combining study, and socialising, for long periods at a time.

A prevailing view amongst teachers and students, that 'autonomy' meant 'going off and doing things yourself' (see Section Two), enabled students to create legitimate spaces to avoid difficult or boring parts of the course, 'nagging' and 'boring' teachers, and to compensate for poor time-management or a heavy workload. Other erosions of teaching time came from pressure to turn lessons over to 'catching up' or to work on current assignments. In addition, resource constraints, such as pressures on full-time teaching contracts and the use of part-time teachers, reduced access to certain teachers. However, there was a difference between the two colleges. Riverside students talked of some teachers being so busy that they could not see them. In contrast, Bridgeview students never complained about lack of access to teachers.

Within the implicit and overt negotiation of acceptable boundaries, there were also fluctuations and periods of drift in engagement during the GNVQ course. In the questionnaire sample, 'the qualification' was a more important goal in year 1 than in year 2. In the fieldwork sample, apparent certainty about goals at the outset of the course became more tentative over the two years. At the end of the fieldwork, 50% of the qualitative sample maintained and followed their goal. Four had their goal (nurse training) disrupted by having to wait a year for entry and five changed their mind about goals.⁹

Some students moved from *introjected* and *identified* motivation to *intrinsic* engagement on a fairly stable basis:

responses. At the seminar to discuss findings, teachers thought qualitative accounts of motivation were useful but they also pointed out the effects of fluctuation and timing.

⁹ Colleges' data about exact destinations for students was incomplete and varied between courses in the study. Please see Appendix 7 for details of the qualitative sample.

It was just external and now it's internal. I like most of the subjects and if I'm struggling [the teacher] will help me (Tracey, BS Year2).

Interviews with some students indicated a shift for all 18 students from the *identified* motivation of meeting the requirements towards confidence with content of units. Other shifts occurred at points of transition. Once immersed enthusiastically in his new job, Kevin's disappointment with GNVQ was replaced with retrospective enthusiasm and a philosophical assessment of what he had gained from it. As he started to learn the new norms of a university course, Michael recognised that he was a novice in terms of the autonomy he would need to show and drew instead on social acceptance to sustain *identified* motivation until he could start developing autonomy again. And, as she adjusted to the uncertainty of a temporary job, and her third change in idea for a career, Lynda's final interview, held in the college, showed tension between nostalgia for the security of GNVQ and breaking away to precarious independence. In these fluctuations, the young people in the study echoed the often erratic adjustments of college students in Bloomer's study (Bloomer, 1999) and in Hodgkinson et al's study of young people's career choices (1996).

During the GNVQ itself, all eighteen students dealt stoically with negative fluctuations. These included: a heavy assignment workload; not getting expected grades; tensions in the group over treatment of those who met deadlines and those who did not; falling attendance and retention rates in year 2 and a corresponding decline in social support within groups; having to defer a university place; being rejected by university. As a result, all students' attitudes fluctuated dramatically between Year 1 and Year 2 (see Figure 1). Half-way through, *introjected* and *identified* motivation were much more evident, driven by pressures of workload, worries about end goals and the repetitiveness of the assessment regime.

Stoicism and ‘getting through’ were, however, more obvious amongst students in year 2 from both courses in Riverside College where timetable structures¹⁰, teachers changes and the loss of favourite teachers in Year 2 de-motivated students. When social dimensions to motivation fluctuated, students reported that *amotivated* and *externally* motivated students outside the sample became less socially committed to their peers, resulting in poor attendance. And, if teaching also changed, motivated students had to become more self-reliant:

The first year we already laid the foundation, though, that was the thing, and so we're more than capable of going out and doing good work, regardless of whether the teaching ability or standards aren't up to the first year (Darren, Year 2, BS, Riverside)

Yet, despite signs of low motivation in all four courses, and, in Kevin's case, a lower final grade, there was no overt resentment. Instead, students were stoical, determined, and ‘got through’: *it's just something you have to do... you just have to be able to get on with things* (Kevin). These traits were more apparent amongst those who had progressed from Intermediate to Advanced:

Doing a GNVQ, you expect [repetition] though, that's what a GNVQ is (Louise, BS Year2, Riverside)

d. Summary

Students in the study showed a complex mix over two years of the course of introjected, identified, intrinsic and interested motivation and parallel fluctuations in social motivation and individual self-reliance. These dimensions resonate with Bloomer's study of college students (Bloomer, 1999) and the ‘turning points’ and ‘transformations’ of young people in Hodgkinson et al's study (1996). In addition to the demands of the course, some students had profound personal changes to deal with in family life and in new perceptions of their own identity. Dealing with fluctuations and transitions required

¹⁰ Students were indignant if course contact time was fragmented across days rather than compacted efficiently into 3 day blocks.

students to sustain clear end goals, to have support at home and to engage with subject content. They also had to manage relationships within the group and with teachers.

Immersing oneself enthusiastically in a course, was, in part, a strategic response by young people still in full-time formal education because of the pressures of credentialism in difficult local economic circumstances. Although examples of instrumentalism and resignation, indicated by *introjected* and *identified* motivation, might appear to confirm widespread poor motivation in FE (see Bloomer and Hodkinson 1997, 1999), I would argue that these responses played out somewhat differently when students start from embedded enthusiasm and a strong sense of having a second chance.

Figures 2 and 3 below are an attempt to capture the interactions of different forms of motivation and to locate the eighteen students within them. It adopts Martin Bloomer's notion of 'learning career', "*in which people's dispositions to those aspects of experience which bear upon their capacity to learn, endure or transform over time...shape their dispositions to learning over time*" (Bloomer 1999, also 1997). This shows, as Bloomer argues, that 'drift' and 'engagement' within a programme are not distinct (Bloomer, 1999). Figure 3 summarises the main fluctuations in motivation over the two years.

As the next section shows, motivation is bound up with the types of autonomy students think they gain from GNVQs, and with their perceptions of what is important.

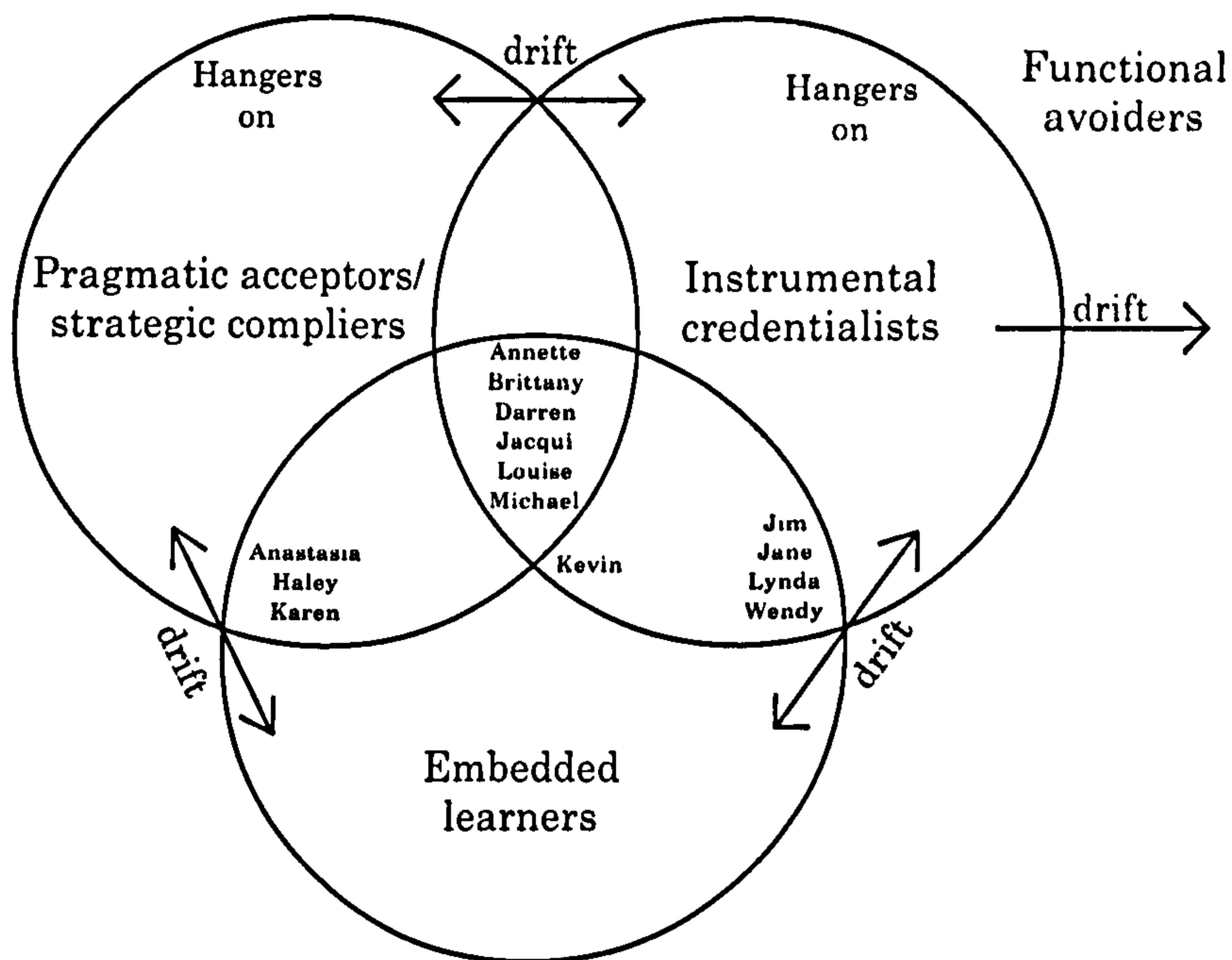
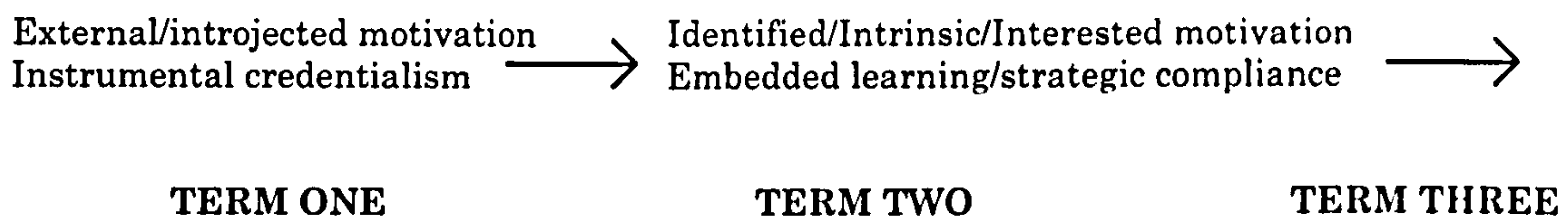


Figure 2

Motivation and 'drift' amongst GNVQ students. The categories draw upon work by Macrae et al (1997), Bloomer and Hodgkinson (1997; 1999), discussed in Chapter Three and above.

YEAR 1



YEAR 2

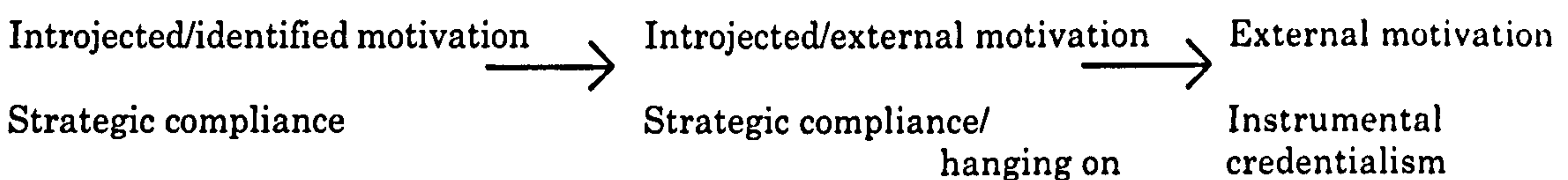


Figure 3

Types of motivation over two years of a GNVQ programme. The categories draw on the typology of motivation discussed in Chapter Three and work cited above.

2. DEVELOPING AUTONOMY

a. Goals for autonomy

Second to 'getting the qualification', 87% of the questionnaire sample felt that GNVQs enabled them to become more independent but, interestingly, they did not cite 'independence' as the main benefit of doing GNVQ.

In the fieldwork sample, students' initial responses to 'why have teachers chosen you as independent' were fairly general: "*I just get on with my work*"; "*I work hard*"; "*I don't ask for help*".¹¹ There was a recurring conflation throughout the study of autonomy with 'being on your own' or 'doing everything yourself'. From a group interview with year 1 students at Bridgeview, for example':

It [independence] means going off yourself and find out more yourself and getting it checked and then carry on;

you like to do things on your own, you don't need any help, you don't rely on anybody else to do your work for you, you go and you do your research

These views did not alter over the two years and, for some students, GNVQs appeared to suit existing dispositions:

I just do things by myself...in class I always like getting involved in whatever the lecturer is saying where everyone else just sits there and says nowt...my assignments I just do my assignments myself and don't ask for help..like today, he [lecturer] is explaining the bullets¹² just to get a Pass and I've already done them. I'm always like that (Jane, HSC Year 2, Bridgeview).

¹¹ Although I attempted to define the term 'autonomy', as opposed to 'independence', to students at the outset of the fieldwork, I used the term 'independence' with them afterwards.

¹² All students and staff in my sample using the post-Capey pilot specifications refer to the specifications that set out the criteria in bullet points under each grade as 'the bullets' (see Appendix).

In contrast, for the three young women I characterised as black swans, becoming autonomous was synonymous with growing up. For Jacqui, pride in achieving high grades led to new confidence with peers and adults. Louise saw her mature approach to GNVQs as linked inextricably to moving out from her parents' house and getting her own flat. In a similar vein, Britney was proud of her independence:

I don't let anyone bother me and I'm always on the go and don't really rely on anyone anymore. It's the same at home. I don't rely on my parents for anything, for money or help unless it's something serious. I usually get on and do things myself...Everyone has noticed how much I've changed. For someone who is only 18, from 16 to 18 I've had such a big jump and changed so much (Britney, HSC Year1, Riverside).

Although examples here indicate life-related notions of autonomy, students also valued deeper meanings of learning-related autonomy.¹³ These emerged through fieldwork activities that focused on actual examples of teaching and assessment, 'best' teachers and useful or interesting assignments. Using statements about autonomy and motivation from the typology in Chapter Three¹⁴, nine students discussed the types of autonomy that GNVQ encourages and those they made most progress in. Most students saw a greater emphasis on procedural autonomy and were proud of their familiarity with the minutiae of the GNVQ system:

The most tangible is the specifications; I think when everyone first started they couldn't understand the way they were worded but the more you do them, the more you seem to find out what they want because they use words like 'conclusion', 'evaluate' and 'compare' (Stephen, Year 2 BS, Bridgeview).

As discussion below shows, some students began to internalise what these criteria meant as a basis for critical autonomy.

Although procedural autonomy was tangible, most students' aims for progress began with their personal autonomy. Annette, for example, initially saw the assessment procedures as

¹³ These are, of course, iterative and development of one can lead to the other and vice versa.

¹⁴ See Chapter Five and Appendix 14 for details of the card sort activity.

an annoying hindrance. She used the assignments to ‘analyse herself’ and to explore lives of young people she knew. By Year 2, although her shifts between different forms of motivation were very erratic, she eventually reconciled her personal interests and her own idiosyncratic, creative approach to assignments with the demands of the grading criteria. Nonetheless, she remained more grudging about the need to gain procedural autonomy over requirements than did other students.

Data from interviews and the card sort activity showed the extent to which students valued different attributes and constructed their personal progress in precise, individual ways. These encompassed small and longer-term changes, based on informal, ipsative targets and their own haphazard assessments of progress¹⁵. For some, new targets were, initially, extremely daunting. Haley, for example, had to adapt to Advanced specifications in college from Intermediate ones at school. In her first assignment:

I noticed that it was written more difficult, not just for you to understand but for you to really think about what you were having to answer... it wasn't that it was written down but you had to think of the whole meaning of what the question was. Whereas you were told exactly what to do in the Intermediate but you had to expand it in the Advanced (Haley, BS Year1, Bridgeview).

A plethora of transitions emerged that students saw as important are illustrated here by statements from group and individual interviews:

- *becoming more organised*
- *learning how to use the library*
- *being open to anything people bring to me*
- *going out and finding information*
- *using a computer, using the Web*
- *putting things from books into my own words*
- *learning about things I've never heard of before*

¹⁵ As Chapter Three shows, ‘ipsative’ is a powerful but often overlooked form of self-assessment. It requires students to set goals and criteria for assessing them. However, the criteria derive entirely from one’s own targets assessed against previous performance and are not an imposed external measure.

- *in Intermediate it was all done for you, whereas here you have to go out to the Learning Centre and do a lot more yourself*

Being “*allowed to go outside college*” or to the Learning Centre symbolised both escape from classroom walls and boundaries, and trust from teachers.

Three students recognised changes in their approaches to learning. In responding to his card sort, Michael saw autonomy differently in the first term at university than he did in GNVQ and began to relate critical autonomy to subject content:

K: *which type [of autonomy] is your priority?*

M: (pointing to ‘critical’ statements) *this one has an effect on the other two and I think they do need to be developed. Say this one [reads out statement]: ‘I understand ethical issues in the subject’. One of the criteria might be about an ethical issue so if you don’t understand the subject, you don’t understand the issue and you’re not going to be able to develop your work and understand the procedures for Pass, Merit and Distinction.*

For all eighteen students, progression, motivation and autonomy were inextricably bound up with forming new identities. Four saw GNVQ as a second chance to retrieve a failed attempt at A-levels. More generally, fourteen viewed the transition to college as another chance to achieve a qualification. Tracey, for example, was enthusiastic that she was no longer motivated negatively by being “*worried about the deadlines, the teachers, the headmaster*” at school. Annette used the ‘*more adult*’ atmosphere of college to work out her own identity and status with peers, free from bullying at school for ‘*being different*’: “*If I’d have been bullied here, I wouldn’t feel confident enough to go to university*”.

Three students were consciously changing their self-image as learners from how they were at school and were therefore motivated by ‘*doing better than the teachers think you can*’. All eighteen saw general confidence and social skills as crucial outcomes of GNVQ:

I can talk to more people now. Before I was a bit shy but now I'm not, I don't care really...I'm confident at work as well. I'm a barman at work so I'm more confident in making decisions (Jim, BS Year2, Bridgeview).

Personal autonomy was essential to having the confidence to ask teachers' questions. The ability to do this about GNVQ procedures moved some students into seeking more sophisticated guidance:

You have to say 'right, I'm not sure about that so what do I have to do and where am I going to get this from?' You have to say 'well can you help me'? and be able to speak up and tell people the situation because people aren't going to know unless you speak up (Kevin, BS Year2, Riverside).

Although there were strong indications of procedural autonomy and individual targets for personal autonomy, indicators of critical autonomy as characterised in Chapter Three were more difficult to elicit. A key indicator was whether students gained Distinction grades, since, depending on the unit, criteria required students to engage with knowledge and ideas, to generate broader subject-related questions, rather than procedural or personal ones, or to engage with moral or controversial issues¹⁶.

Yet, most students were wary of Distinctions. The questionnaire sample was asked 'how often do you aim for a Distinction?'

¹⁶ The potential to differentiate more precisely between different types of autonomy realised through the overall design of GNVQ and in specifications for individual units is discussed in Chapter Three.

Table 6. Aiming for a Distinction

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Always	10	16.1	16.7
Often	11	17.7	18.3
Sometimes	20	32.3	33.3
Never	19	30.6	31.7

A cross-tabulation between rates in each college showed that 47% of Bridgeview students ‘never’ aimed for a Distinction compared to 8% of Riverside students. 27% of Riverside students ‘often’ aimed for a Distinction compared to 11% of Bridgeview and 30% of Riverside students ‘always’ aimed for one compared to 6% at Bridgeview. Although 40% gave ‘workload’ as a reason not to aim for a Distinction, 36% said that Distinction was ‘too hard’. In the teachers’ questionnaire, 70% agreed that the criteria are off-putting for all but the most motivated students.

This interesting difference in students’ confidence about grades between the two colleges could be the basis for more robust comparisons between different years, subjects and colleges. The finding may also suggest, tentatively, a more negative effect of the Capey pilot on motivation for Distinction grades than the 1995 model, since 40% of the students who completed the questionnaire were following the 1995 model at Riverside. In the fieldwork sample, 24% aimed for, and gained, Distinctions while the rest aimed for Merits or Passes. This is close to proportions within each group, discussed in Chapter Five, and to figures produced by the QCA. These show that, nationally, 27% gain Distinctions in Business GNVQ and 26% in HSC (QCA cited by Ecclestone and Hall, 2000), but do not differentiate between the Capey and 1995 models.

Depending on the emphasis in the criteria, other fleeting examples of critical autonomy appeared when I marked assignments. In ‘Social Policy’, for example, students attempted to grapple with sociological perspectives. In ‘Behaviour at Work’, they

evaluated the relevance of theories about management styles in the workplace. In 'Financial Transactions', they suggested improvements to companies' business plans. Brief examples relating to a social, moral or political issue or a connection between different units also appeared fleetingly in interviews when students mentioned something new they had learned. Examples here show that students' critical insights are precise, small-scale, subject-specific and erratic and not synthesised across the course as a whole.

Nevertheless, for the six black swans, it is also possible to infer deeper forms of critical autonomy from the ways that students internalised aspects of learning¹⁷ By the end of year 2, three students had developed insights about the quality of their work:

You have to be able to critical of your own work. Not just saying 'I did this wrong and I did this wrong' but how well you did something as well. You have to be able to analyse your own work, I suppose like someone else would analyse your work without knowing what you'd say (Michael, BS Year2, Bridgeview).

He transferred this insight to the first year of university when he recognised the to gain new forms of autonomy without assessment specifications to work from:

You have to decide on how complicated you have to make it [the assignment] and, like, the boundaries for the assignment. It depends on how well you understand the technical language.

He also saw that he would have to be less instrumental and not, for example, wait until the assignment before 'having to read the books', because "*you have to read them to understand and develop your own knowledge*".

¹⁷ However, this ability, and the inferences I'm making here, are influenced by factors such as confidence with interviews and the ability to talk about one's learning. This raises questions about how students' cultural capital influences researchers' perceptions of them. Three young men and one young woman were articulate and confident, while other students were much less confident and precise. There were also differences between colleges: transcripts show that Bridgeview students were generally less talkative and confident than Riverside students. This methodological problem implies the need for other forms of exploration and closer, regular examination of students' work and their responses to materials, teachers' feedback and questions.

Darren also noticed for himself precise examples of where he must become more discerning:

You've got to look at hundreds of different graphs about employment and stuff...and you've got to pick exactly which ones are relevant

For some students, critical insights became obvious once in a full-time job:

I can see both sides of an argument now and I understand why people think like that, it's pretty important in every aspect of life, whether at work or at home (Kevin, Riverside).

b. Actions to maintain and enhance goals

In spite of limits to aiming for Distinctions, confidence with 'the bullets' enabled students to internalise the assessment language of GNVQs identically to teachers (see Chapter Eight). Depending which model they used, they referred constantly to the 'assessment specs', 'the PCs', 'the bullets', 'the grading themes', 'the evidence indicators', 'task by task assessment', referring to unit numbers rather than subject titles or, when referring to assignments, to 'task 1, task 2, task 3.

Direct quotes from the assignment briefs and the grading criteria also crept, frequently and unelicited, into interviews. Although not sharing other characteristics with the black swans, like them, Stephen was confidently familiar with the minutiae and logistics of the assessment system. In explaining how he approached an assignment, he quoted the brief *verbatim* and related his own interpretation of its remit to interpretation by his peers:

It asks you to talk about the political, social, economic and legal characteristics of two countries in the EU. Talk about business and how the differences in those countries would compare to the business. Then it says 'take into consideration these following points underneath. I took that as meaning 'put those points in the bit above with the legal and all that' and other people have taken it and done the legal characteristics separately but that doesn't seem to explain it (Stephen, BS Year2, Bridgeview).

This example indicates that confidence with official language enabled students to make their own sense of what was required. Similarly, when asked what getting a Distinction involved, all students could recall the language of the grading criteria.¹⁸ However, those who regularly gained Distinctions appeared to have internalised what the criteria meant, whereas the rest could recite the terms 'evaluate', 'critically analyse' etc but were hesitant and uncertain about what they meant. In year 2, Michael also internalised phrases from teachers' feedback:

*The past couple of times I have talked about a subject and it's quite vague. So I have thought 'open that up a little more' to achieve the Distinction and then evaluate it*¹⁹:

Students also overlaid the particular demands of GNVQ with traditional images of assessment, such as 'scores' 'marks' 'right and wrong', bullets as 'marks' or 'points' (grades might be *a 'few points off the higher one'*). This led to fairly narrow views about what was required and there was no dissension from an idea that gaining higher grades involved "*just doing more*", "*just covering more bullets*", "*going into more detail*", "*just going off by yourself and then getting it checked*". 'Just' recurred very often in all the interviews and seemed to symbolise a straightforward, even easy, process.

My own marking of assignments showed that the Capey model encouraged students with intrinsic enthusiasm for the topics, aiming for a Merit or Distinction, to accumulate 'the bullets' by starting with the Pass criteria. This generated a volume of material that was extremely difficult to synthesise and analyse in the sophisticated ways needed for a Distinction. Whatever official guidance from QCA says, students thought that progression to higher grades in the Capey model was a linear, quantitative process:

¹⁸ In an analysis of students' and teachers' responses to Advanced GNVQ specifications in the 1995 model, Chris Boys shows that students offer the grading themes for Distinction as the most important qualities. However, '*going beyond what is asked*', '*making an extra effort*', '*looking at different arguments*' were bottom of a list of what they see as important (Boys, 2000).

I think I'll get a Pass at least but it might be a bit further to a Merit (Stephen, BS Year2, Bridgeview).

None of the students altered this cumulative approach as they progressed into year 2.

From a group interview, a Year 2 student explains:

I always aim for a Distinction. I do the Passes and then the Merits and then I look at the Distinctions and see how much time I've got left to try and get the Distinctions. But in that assignment [Planning a Small Enterprise] there was too much and, to be honest, I'd had enough of it so I didn't bother doing the Distinctions.

When asked what depth was needed for evaluation to meet Distinction criteria, he added:

You don't really know. It could be anything. I'd say that 2-3 sides [over and above the merit] would be quite in-depth

Notions of quantity and coverage were prominent in both models: some students talked about “*needing about 40 sides of writing to get a Distinction*”. Splitting the Capey ‘bullets’ into further parts and then aiming at them erratically was also prevalent:

In Task One, if there were bits of a Pass and bits of a Merit, I would still try to answer them both to see if it was easy, and if I could just add to the Pass bit, I would leave the Merit bit and move onto the next question. If there was a Pass/Merit/Distinction there, I would still try to answer them all. So I could get all the Passes or a few Merits and Distinctions and Passes. I just try to answer all the questions I can (Student, BS Year2).

Seeing ‘the bullets’ as separate tasks or questions, and then calculating the work for each, was confirmed by my marking of assignments. Students were proficient at highlighting precise points on their assignments where, in a telling phrase, they ‘hit the bullets’, reducing the criteria to ensuring that they covered ‘P4, P3, M4’ (the numbers they give to each bullet).

¹⁹ I have noticed this trait as the Ph.D progresses, where various phrases from Frank Coffield’s pencilled comments on drafts spring to mind as I type or re-read my work! This internalisation seems essential to becoming immersed in an assessment community and its standards.

Students' work for assignments I marked from the 1995 model was not as atomised as assignments in the Capey model. However, in the formal action plans required in the 1995 model, some students adopted an instrumental 'coverage' approach:

to produce my information into task answers, I will need to exactly follow what is needed to achieve the highest possible grade. I will need to make sure I have successfully completed each task in order to get the grade I want. (Student, BS, Year 1, Riverside).

In contrast, two black swans using this model produced thoughtful and authentic action plans and evaluations, with ideas for difficult concepts that would need to be addressed as well as logistical tasks and further procedural and critical goals arising from their self-evaluations of achievement.

Despite the potential for *intrinsic, interested* motivation and critical autonomy, particularly amongst the six black swans, no evidence was found of students developing a transformatory approach to knowledge and subject content suggested by the typology in Chapter Three. Yet, it is important, as the teachers' experience shows in Chapter Eight, to sustain a careful separation of GNVQ and non-GNVQ factors. The Capey model encouraged procedural autonomy for a Pass and prevented students from developing other forms of autonomy until a specific level of engagement. If students aimed strategically for a Pass or Merit, they avoided critical autonomy altogether. If they worked up through graded stages, their enthusiasm, and the cumulative approach that awarding bodies encouraged teachers to adopt in order to maximise reliability of grades, generated quantities of information that only the very best students could synthesise. For most students, the logical response was to produce compliant statements geared specifically to each bullet point and to resist what they saw as extraneous or irrelevant work.

c. Conditions affecting autonomy

'Responses to requirements' dominated my coding of interview and observation transcripts for all but the black swans. However, it is also important to explore how GNVQ assessment and teachers' uses of it affected students' strategies for improving their work. Students in the qualitative sample did not connect assessment with learning. Instead, assessment was associated with surveillance and external judgements. This view did not change over two years in the eight groups covered by this study. These comments from two separate group interviews show students' views about the purpose of assessment:

- *how you do your work and how you perform the tasks and criteria*
- *how the lecturer looks at you and your assignment to see what they think your potential is*
- *when someone looks at you and what you do and what your work is like*
- *judging your attitude.*

It seems reasonable to infer from such responses, that even if they experienced activities such as peer and self- assessment, students would be unlikely to link them to learning and achievement. The questionnaire for this study also highlighted that: 72% 'never' assess a friend's work and 62% 'never' get someone else to assess their own work. Only 24% always assess their own work before handing it in while 34% do not like to ask teachers for help or know what the higher grades require. A study of attitudes to assessment amongst 50 post-14 students in GCSEs, A-levels, GNVQs, BTEC National Diplomas and NVQs showed that very few students participate in peer assessment or engage deeply with self-assessment (Ecclestone and Hall, 1999).

These findings are borne out by responses from the teachers' questionnaire in this study. 64% said that students '*use the criteria to plan their work*' while only 44% said that they used them to '*evaluate their work*'. There was virtually no difference between the effect of the Capey and 1995 models on this trait. However, although 50% of teachers said that students '*use feedback to improve their work*', 80% felt that the criteria were '*off-putting*

for all but the most motivated of students'. No students in the fieldwork sample engaged in peer assessment while self-assessment for 14 of the 18 involved checking their work against the bullets and using teachers' feedback to fill any gaps. In contrast, one black swan sought out teachers in order to deepen his insights and had also worked out what he could realistically expect from this dialogue:

All you have to do is go to them and say 'look, I'm having a bit of trouble with this, can you sort me out'? Now, I wouldn't expect them to give me the answer but I would expect them to give me some kind of example, kind of thing, which could later be accepted in terms of me going and finding out what it is (Darren, Year1 BS, Riverside).

Students varied in whether they supported each other individually, in friendship cliques or across the group. Michael and Darren helped students outside their immediate clique but the rest maintained a solitary approach, where autonomy meant "*not being dependent on anyone else, being independent on (sic) yourself*" (Jane, HSC Year 2, Bridgeview). Despite good relationships with teachers and other students, the association of autonomy with 'doing things yourself' seemed to form a strong aversion to asking for help, either from teachers or students. The view here is typical:

Most people try to [do the work] themselves and then if they can't, they ask their friends first and the teachers after that (Stephen, BS Year2, Bridgeview)

Other reinforcements to a stoical self-reliance came from negative judgements about 'lazy' peers:

If you have worked hard and the other person hasn't, they say 'I could do that and get a better mark' and I don't think that's fair, it's just laziness (Anastasia, Riverside Yr2)

The association of autonomy with solitary, self-reliance was a barrier to seeking help to improve assignments, particularly for less confident students:

If I do some work, and I'm not happy with it, I can take it to someone and they can say 'it's brilliant' but I still think I have done it wrong. I have to be confident so that I can go

and do something myself, whereas if I just take it to someone else, that is not being independent by getting someone else's opinion (Wendy BS Year2, Bridgeview).

Associations of 'help' with 'having problems' or with being 'thick' led to a view that 'help' reduced the self-reliance that was a source of pride and maturity. Less confident students wanted to be accepted socially and this meant showing the same self-reliance as more confident peers. Apart from Darren and Louise who took their work regularly to teachers for feedback, students equated self-reliance with maturity. Even confident, popular students associated help from teachers with college work with other forms of dependency:

I always feel stupid about asking for help or to borrow money...I feel like I have failed in some way...I would probably just try to do it myself and then I might not do it very well and would have to settle for whatever mark I could get (Kevin BS, Year 2, Riverside).

In difficult units like Social Policy, even enthusiastic students who wanted to do well were reluctant to ask for help:

Lynda: the unit was hard and you had to keep asking [name of tutor] for help all the time so I felt like I wasn't achieving and that he was doing the assignment for me

K: So you had the idea that if you ask for help you weren't being independent?

L: Yes

K: And did you get that idea from the course or was it your view?

L: Just my view because in Intermediate [GNVQ] they said 'don't ask us all the time because you'll not get a very good grade' so that's what I picked up and took to the Advanced

Lynda transferred her view of autonomy from the Intermediate course and her confidence with the GNVQ assessment system enhanced her status with peers. It also formed a barrier to the help she needed to become critically autonomous. In the same assignment, she rejected ideas from the tutor about good books to use because "you wanted you own

evidence for the bibliography". Significantly, she transferred this view from the previous course.

Other powerful norms amongst students consolidated habits learned from school. Notions of 'making mistakes', 'getting it wrong', 'showing yourself up' appeared frequently in interviews and led most students to play safe:

Nobody ever looks at anybody's work...we all just think 'that's what we've got, there's no point'. If they have got a Distinction, well done to them...I just hand it in really because I think if I've got all that right and it comes back, I would be 'oh well what have I done wrong because I thought I'd done that'. I just hope for the best. (Wendy, BS Year2, Bridgeview).

Given that critical autonomy requires engagement with formative assessment, whether from oneself, from peers or teachers, I asked students to talk about how they used teachers' feedback on assignments and the feedback they valued²⁰. Students liked teachers to be clear and precise about how to fill gaps in criteria if work was referred, preferably face to face rather than through written comments. Students saw this type of feedback as the main characteristic of 'teachers they learn[ed] the most from':

I like the way that [name of tutor] actually takes the time to type it up. He must have really read the assignments because he had every bit that you had to do, step by step and I thought it was brilliant (Annastasia, HSC Year2, Riverside).

Nevertheless, GNVQ teachers did not write '*lots of comments to give you more ideas*', and, Stephen, like Anastasia, regretted that GNVQs did not encourage teachers to be more flexible or to go beyond feedback about the criteria. However, he remembered a reason given by teachers:

The guidelines are that strict that they can't mark differently. If they know what you mean but you don't say what you want then the external examiners can't pass you. A lot

²⁰ I originally intended to focus this question by asking students to talk through their responses to a returned assignment and its feedback with me. However, students often 'forget' to bring their work with them to an interview, perhaps implying nervousness about talking about their work with someone outside the assessment community.

of the time, the teachers know you personally after seeing you for 2 years and they know what you are trying to say and people outside won't know what you are trying to say so they can't give us a pass (Stephen, BS Year 2 Bridgeview).

As Chapter Eight shows, this 'passing on' of official interpretations affected teachers' practices. It encouraged students to 'sign post' content to relevant criteria, since students were told "*You have to write as if the examiner isn't very bright*" (Stephen, year 2 BS, Bridgeview).

It seems that expectations of the level and type of engagement that students wanted were shaped by the requirements themselves, being in the same group for two years, limited formal contact with teachers and dispositions which students brought from past experience of assessment. More subtly, students set other limits to acceptable engagement, linked partly to perceptions of what was relevant, useful knowledge. The official status of 'the bullets' made five students overtly minimalist in units they dislike:

I do follow the bullet points but I find that the tutors want you to go into a lot more depth than it says in the book but yet the books have the points you have got to get to get a pass so why can't we just follow the points to pass and that will be it...[name of tutor] goes on and on and he gives you all this info and you think 'do we need this, it hasn't got it in the bullet points' (Britney, Year1 HSC, Riverside).

In separate interviews, four students complained about contradictions between teachers' assignment briefs and the specifications and there were pressures on some teachers to reduce expectations to covering the bullet points rather than doing a broader project. Three teachers in the sample adopted this approach.²¹

Conditions on autonomy also arose from different responses amongst students to developing 'cultural capital', namely an understanding of the rules of the game (both unspoken and overt) and confidence with language and discourses to maximise opportunities within a 'community of practice'. Although students here may not possess

the broader cultural capital of middle-class students in other studies (Macrae et al, 1999; Ball et al, 1999), access to specifications enabled students to use an official language confidently in order to engage with a GNVQ assessment community. Specifications also made some teachers discuss with students the qualities they associated with independence. This confronted students with the different values, styles and practices of different teachers and their particular interpretations of the assessment criteria. Higher achieving students saw these differences as an advantage:

In unit 6, he wouldn't say what was right or wrong or give advice until we got the assignment back and we had to find out where the error was... 'if you ask me for advice, you're not being independent', that's his attitude... It's good to have a mix of attitudes because then we've got to find out what we're doing wrong ouRSelves and put it right... If they don't give you the answers, you'll go and look for them youRSelves and you'll think 'I can do it, it's not as hard as I thought it would be' (Louise, Year 1 BS, Riverside, original emphasis).

Yet public specifications also exposed some teachers and their assessment practices to some animated indignation and to a particular form of autonomy²²:

I look [over my work] first, just in case, 'cos they've got loads to mark and you can't really take their word for it...[in one assignment], I knew for a fact that I'd met the criteria for a merit and he was going 'you haven't done such and such' and I pointed to it and said 'there it is' and pulled it out, and I said 'this isn't on 'cos I've checked it off myself and went through it and through it again' and he'd taken them in all in one week and handed them back the next and you can't do that, not with all those assignments (Jane, Year 2 HSC, Bridgeview)

Although there were other examples of challenges, there was very little overall negativity about assessment. Despite criticism of some feedback, every student mentioned pressures on teachers, seeing them as '*always rushing about*' and '*having so many jobs to do*'.

²¹ This must have been a widespread phenomenon in the Capey pilot because awarding bodies are telling teachers in preparation for Curriculum 2000 that complete assignment scenarios must be used.

²² In another long, animatedly indignant story, two students in Riverside college resubmitted exactly the same work to test a teacher's interpretation of grades, getting a higher mark second time round.

Students also related different types of autonomy to different teachers' skills and different subject demands. In the card sort exercise, nine students related autonomy to the 'teacher you learn the most from'. All chose one who 'pushed them beyond what seems easy'. All the black swans differentiated between such teachers and those with a more pragmatic approach. For example:

[name of tutor] puts into perspective what you have to do but he doesn't motivate you to do the tasks, although he's a top bloke (Darren, Year 2 BS, RS)

During the fieldwork, students talked often about individual teachers, differentiating between them according to their skills, motivation and adherence to the GNVQ requirements:

A: Sometimes teachers want to do their own thing and give a broader aspect to the subject...whereas other teachers will just do the bullet points because that is what you need to get the Pass

K: Why do some do that and not others, do you think?

A: I think some like teaching more than others. Sometimes they find it tedious to teach a subject so they just do it as quick as they can...It's like [name of tutor] is a psychologist and I find the way he teaches GNVQ is the way he would teach A-level...He goes into the subject in depth and he wants you to find out what's in the subject rather than you just doing the bullet points. I think he likes it (Annastasia, HSC Year 2, RV).

Expectations about characteristics of 'real' or 'good' GNVQ teachers fluctuated over the two years and changes to staffing could be unsettling:

We got used to the way that each person was talking...so we knew how to understand them. When they started changing we were just getting used to the other one and then they rearranged it all again, so that was making it harder for us really (Naomi, Year2 BS, Riverside).

As work-load and *identified* motivation increased in year 2, my last interview with Darren, Louise and Naomi produced an animated discussion between them about whether

subject expertise, personality or knowing the GNVQ requirements was the main criterion for being a 'good' teacher. The latter won the day.

In contrast, some students saw the 'community of practice' provided in a college course as a space for trying out new ways to gain confidence and status with peers and teachers. Annette saw a good relationship with teachers as the most important aspect of GNVQ: a 'real' teacher was someone authentic, tolerant and challenging who brought aspects of themselves and their lives into their subject. She was dismissive of teachers who 'just stuck to' the assessment criteria.

Teachers' genuine respect and concern for students, intrinsic interest in their subject and, crucially, 'being a real GNVQ teacher', with command of the assessment system, were important characteristics for students' confidence that they could develop autonomy. In the card sort, Lynda, for example, believed that she had the potential for attributes such as '*seeing different sides to an issue*' or '*recognising controversial issues*' but that some teachers saw this as unrealistic:

[for social policy] I picked gender and he goes 'oh that's too complicated, you'll never pull it all together'. He doesn't think we can do it but I showed him and he goes 'oh you managed it, you pulled it together quite well' (Lynda, HSC Year 2, Bridgeview).

Lynda was a striking example of quiet determination, consistent engagement and optimism. Yet it is important to recognise that she was developing a new positive image of herself as able to overcome previous negative expectations and she saw this teacher as having high expectations of her. His response might therefore have been a deliberate challenging tactic²³.

Transitions and 'turning points' also shaped responses to an assessment system. For Michael, leaving the cohesive, tightly-knit group at Bridgeview meant learning, then

²³ My observation of his lessons and interviews with him suggest the latter and again shows the importance of finding ways in qualitative research to go beyond 'espoused theories'.

negotiating, new norms in a university environment as well as new forms of cultural capital in relation to assessment:

I've tried finding my personal tutor and my friends went to see him but we haven't been formally introduced. That's so different from GNVQ. It was totally cosy and now it's totally independent.

In contrast, some students' unwillingness to go beyond dispositions they brought from past experience of learning programmes could limit autonomy:

I'm not a different person when I come to college; I have a definite way of doing things and they don't want it like that, it doesn't meet the way they want it (Kevin, Year 2, BS, Riverside)

I always feel I have to prove myself to a new teacher...if I've got a referral for instance, I find it hard to take what they are telling me to do...I've always been like that..So if I get a referral, I prefer just to get on with it rather than them taking me aside and telling me (Annette, Year 1 HSC, Riverside).

Michael's transition suggests that, unless students can move beyond dispositions established or consolidated in GNVQ, their expectations of security and of continuing particular dispositions can result in drift.

d. Summary

In ways reminiscent of procedural autonomy noted in the TVEI (Barnes et al, 1988) and in other studies of GNVQs (Bates, 1998a; Helsby, et al, 1999), GNVQ students 'made and shaped their day' according to the particular cultures of each course and college. There was more scope for this at Riverside college. They also enjoyed 'hunting and gathering' information (Bates, 1998a), an essential motivator for students in this study. However, the procedural autonomy they developed seemed to be more worthwhile than mere negotiation around the criteria or cynical approaches to 'hunting and gathering'. The eighteen students were proud of their work and saw it as sometimes difficult, different and challenging. Students' experiences also suggested that command of

procedures, and confidence in using a common technical language, were essential for developing the confidence to try new things. Importantly, for some students confidence led to a willingness to discuss subject-related issues with teachers.

At one level, students seemed to bear out my initial proposition that procedural autonomy may be both a necessary pre- or co-requisite for other forms of autonomy. Each student had individual targets and precise indicators of her or his own progression, albeit *ad hoc* and erratic. In the light of the typology, some developed aspects of personal autonomy and occasional, fleeting aspects of critical autonomy. Individual teachers, the content of different units and different stages of the course all affected these characteristics.

Students saw their emerging strengths and weaknesses as important and ten of the eighteen cited enthusiastically specific examples of how they came to see issues in different ways. All students in the study could have consolidated their fluctuating, and sometimes precarious, *intrinsic* and *interested* motivation but only six seemed open to developing critical autonomy. Although procedural and personal forms of autonomy were important, there were more barriers to critical autonomy than robust indicators of it. This arose both from the specifications themselves and from students' responses to them.

3. EVALUATING THE EFFECTS OF GNVQ ASSESSMENT

a. 'Embedded compliers' and 'strategic transformers'

Of the sample of eighteen students, twelve were enthusiastic, engaged and determined. Their GNVQ experience was characterised by development of procedural autonomy, important measures of ipsative progress and by working in a comfort zone which set tacit and overt limits to acceptable engagement. For 'the cygnets', then, GNVQs were an important second chance to gain a useful qualification in a conducive and pleasant atmosphere created with friendship cliques and teachers. Students with limited past success in formal qualifications achieved acceptable levels of performance within a comfort zone created by the specifications in a reasonably cohesive community of teachers and students. Specifications enabled students to assess their own progress, to

gain confidence and motivation and to shape their work in a context where resources, particularly contact time with teachers, were reduced. In particular, the assessment system reinforced security for students from Intermediate GNVQ.

All eighteen students had some characteristics of 'embedded learners' in other studies (Macrae et al, 1999; Ball et al, 1999). In particular, their confidence and personal development were bound up with a largely optimistic process of 'becoming somebody' (Macrae et al, 1998). However, this 'somebody' might be a fantasy confined by the course rather than a broader 'somebody' with a sense of a future. Making the most of educational opportunities, and setting small steps for ipsative measures of progress, were integral to this. To a very limited extent, they shared some characteristics of 'vocational transformers' (Fevre et al, 1999) based on *intrinsic* and *interested* engagement with subject content. It can therefore be argued that the best GNVQ students were 'embedded compliers' or 'instrumental transformers' and they did not fit neatly into the categories in other research on motivation discussed in Chapter Three.

There were other differences from the 'embedded' learners of other studies. GNVQ students in my sample did not, for example, possess high levels of social and cultural capital, insights about maximising the best option in a credentialist system or resources to travel to other options. Nor did they have the sustained commitment to learning for self and communal improvement noted by Fevre et al. (1999). And, apart from the black swans, they did not, for the moment at least, see themselves moving outside their local communities. They were therefore 'embedded learners' but only up to a point.

Six students went beyond procedural autonomy and haphazard ipsative measures of personal autonomy to develop some aspects of critical autonomy and a more considered approach to ipsative assessment. Michael was on the Business course at Bridgeview, Darren and Louise progressed from Intermediate GNVQ to the Business course at Riverside, Annette and Britney were on the HSC course at Riverside and Jacqui was on the HSC course at Bridgeview. Three progressed from Intermediate GNVQ, one from the first year of A-levels and two from GCSEs. Although this section reads like a

teacher's reference for a GNVQ black swan, it summarises the main features that seem to differentiate black swans from other students in the study.

First, they aimed for and achieved Distinctions, mastered the assessment system and were committed to its demands, both procedurally, personally and, to a much lesser extent, critically. They had clear end goals that they saw as both credible and positive and could move from *external* to *introjected* and *identified* to *intrinsic* and *interested* forms of motivation in certain subjects, frequently with great enthusiasm. They also played strategically to their strengths. They sustained *introjected* motivation during periods of drift or fluctuation in engagement and drew on *social* motivation to get them through low times during the course.

Second, social motivation was central to their achievement. They were committed to positive group dynamics, had good relationships with teachers and cared about the achievement of other students including, for Jacqui, lower achieving students outside her GNVQ group. They also drew on sources outside college for support and ideas. Despite being judgmental of peers' poor motivation and lack of engagement, they were confident with other students and proud of being role models. The black swans were comfortable with their identity, particularly as learners, and confident with 'outsiders' to the community.

Third, black swans enjoyed getting on well with teachers both informally and formally. Unlike other students who 'put up with' different values and practices amongst teachers, they adapted to teachers' strengths and weaknesses and maximised opportunities to draw on expertise from teachers they rated highly. Once at university, Michael appreciated new styles of teaching from those he was used to in GNVQ, even if he found them unsettling. In addition, black swans internalised some of the cultural capital implied in the assessment specifications and in teachers' feedback, as opposed to articulating it by rote.

However, there were gender differences. Data relating to the two young men had more coding on 'cultural capital' and 'social dimensions' than on 'responses to requirements'. The young men were more confident in asking teachers for help, in transforming the feedback into deeper learning and in talking at length in interviews for this study. In contrast, the young women tended to be more instrumental, focused more on personal and peer dimensions to learning and were less sure during interviews.

Interestingly, and despite lower morale amongst students and teachers in Riverside college, noted earlier, four black swans were from Riverside. The sample size as a whole does not suggest that this might be generalisable and analysis in Chapter Eight of teachers' approaches to the GNVQ course does not shed light on this either. It may be because the student intake at Riverside is more diverse and cosmopolitan than at Bridgeview, giving students in this study some initial social confidence, or because they had other sources of confidence and autonomy in their lives.

b. 'Procedural criticality'

GNVQ specifications enabled students to move into an assessment community. Unlike Yeoman's account of GNVQs (1999), teachers in this study did not 'protect' students from the specifications. Instead, students used them extensively. For some students, this had an impact similar to the one noted by Caroline Gipps about records of achievement:

The opportunity for one to one discussion made an enormous impact on many students who had never before had the chance of an individual conversation with a teacher about their learning on a regular basis. An important element of these processes is their impact on students' views of themselves (Gipps quoted by Oates 1997, p141).

Specifications were important for less confident students because they enabled them to resist peer pressure not to be a diligent student and provided a source for ipsative, achievable goals. Access to a community's public assessment standards was also a basis for procedural autonomy. It seemed to make the GNVQ community's cultural capital intelligible to its members and was therefore a foundation for internalising expected standards of achievement, particularly in the early stages of a new community of practice.

However, as Black and Wiliam argue (1998a), merely adopting others' language undermines opportunities and the inclination for teachers and learners to construct meanings together, and trivialises social knowledge. To counter these effects, teachers would need to promote consciously a notion of collaborative dialogue to prevent students becoming stuck with the technical terms and mind-set that GNVQ assessment imposed on their thinking. In turn, this conscious 'moving on' would need to encourage students to ask different types of questions of teachers. Ultimately, the uniformity and prominence of the specifications constrained expectations of autonomy amongst all students in the sample.

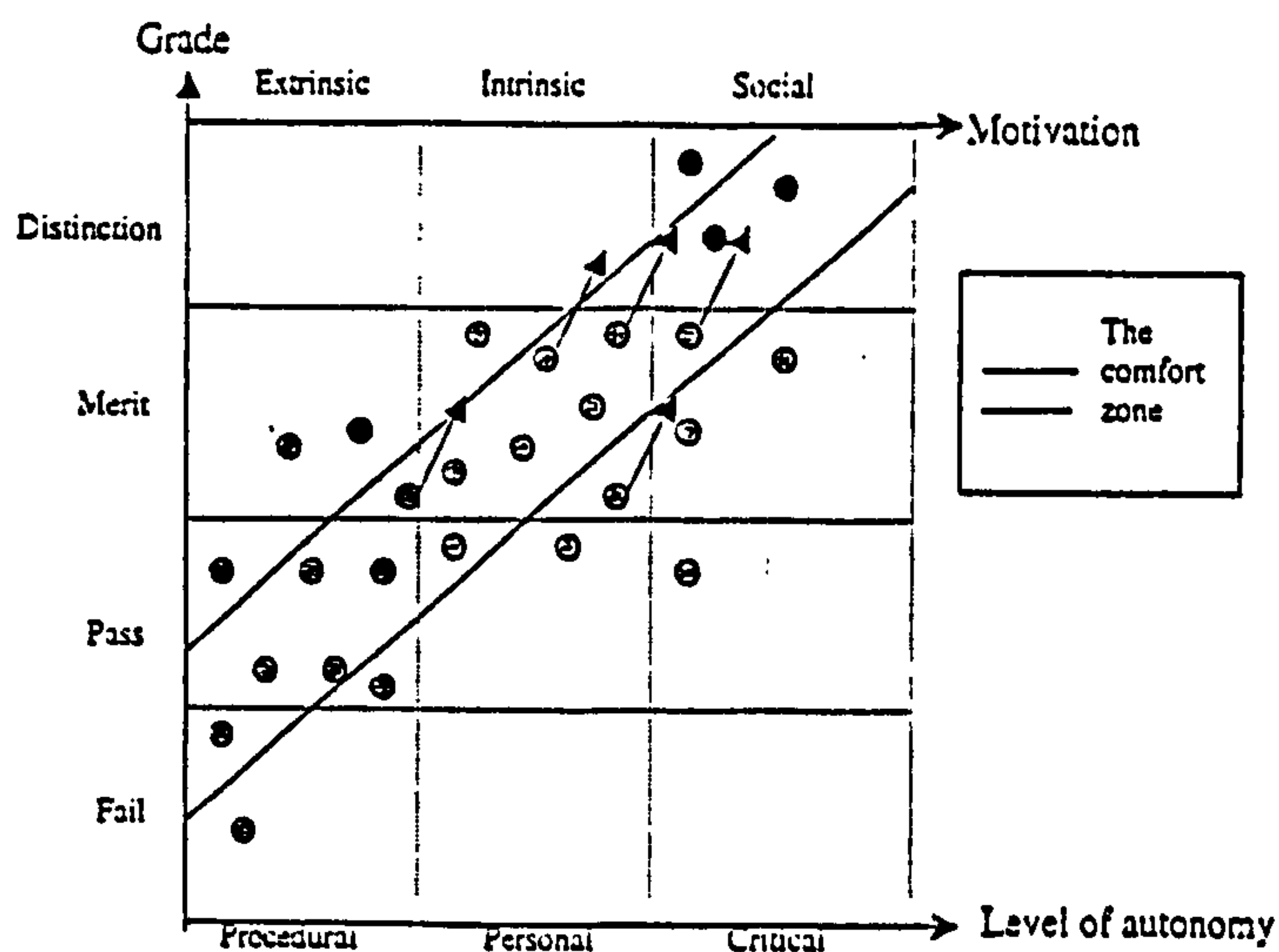
There are also questions about the basis of students' challenges over procedures and assessment decisions. Students were particularly critical of what they saw as slipshod skim marking and poor feedback and also used the specifications to question what they saw as irrelevant or useless knowledge. Whilst autonomy to challenge is important, there are broader tensions over whose expertise really counts in deciding what is useful or useless, difficult or simple, or what criteria mean. As Bloomer argues (1998), GNVQs can lead students to make judgements about issues for which they may not be qualified, such as the depth required for criteria like 'critical analysis'. These problems beg questions about the sophistication with which even the best students engage with the criteria.

c. Working in the comfort zone²⁴

Figure 4 below should ideally be in three dimensions but shows that achievement could relate to different types of autonomy and motivation. Students with high levels of autonomy and motivation were more comfortable working at a particular level. The black swans, potentially, could act as magnets to draw their lower achieving peers towards better grades.

²⁴ Fay Smith created the graph from a discussion between her, Elaine Hall and myself, showing the power of social motivation and collegial commitment.

Students with procedural autonomy and *introjected* and *identified* forms of motivation worked in a lower comfort zone. Some students, like Michael, aimed for Distinction grades but returned to an easier comfort zone to achieve Passes and Merits. Others, like Wendy, ventured out of their comfort zone by aiming for higher grades initially but did not have the personal autonomy, confidence or social motivation necessary to stay there. Some, like Kevin, operated below their comfort zone but other opportunities, such as organising gigs for his soul band, enabled him to develop intrinsic and social motivation and autonomy outside the course and its assessment requirements. Annette fluctuated erratically between intrinsic and *interested* motivation to work in a higher comfort zone and her desire for status with lower achieving, *externally*, or *amotivated*, peers. When operating above their comfort zone, Louise and Annette sometimes experienced overload.



Another effect was that the complex dynamics of forming and sustaining the comfort zone enabled all but six students to resist, both overtly and subconsciously, deeper forms of critical autonomy. This was partly because students brought attitudes built up from previous experience. Studies of assessment in primary schools, for example, note growing instrumentalism and lack of willingness to engage in deep learning. As Triggs et al. argue:

in a climate of explicit and categic assessment, many [primary] pupils avoided challenge and had a low threshold of ambiguity (Triggs et al. quoted by Broadfoot 1998).

In a comfort zone, the specifications offered security. They also compensated for restricted contact time with teachers. More subtly, they exerted authority over students' perceptions of autonomy and consolidated their view that autonomy meant solitary, compliant work and not needing 'help'. Since these attributes were a source of pride, less confident students, and those who moved into a daunting situation or a difficult subject, found it difficult to ask for help. Feeling stupid may have made them avoid doing so, especially when more confident peers appeared to 'just get on with the work' alone.

In addition, deeper forms of autonomy were too difficult and time consuming to develop within the confines of other commitments, such as having a job, doing other qualifications and fitting in a social life. This resonates with findings from a study of 500 FE students which found that:

"Overwhelmingly, the motivation to mix work and study is to earn money...from a desire to maintain a preferred lifestyle rather than from financial hardship. There are therefore suggestions that work has negative effects on achievement" (Davies, 2000)

There are complex tensions here to reconcile. In my study, students expected to manage GNVQs within pragmatic boundaries created by the logistics of their lives. Work, social life and the comfort zone combined to set expectations of minimum, acceptable workloads and of degrees of difficulty demanded by assignments: the Pass criteria were an important mechanism for judging this. Emphasis on procedural autonomy and resistance to 'difficult' forms of autonomy were reinforced by instrumental self and peer assessment.

At the same time, the identical layouts and language of specifications implied that autonomy is the same in each subject and each year of the Advanced GNVQ. Familiarity in using a uniform set of specifications led confident students to a simplistic view of what was required, particularly for Distinction grades. In unpopular or difficult units, both tendencies encouraged some students to judge in advance 'boring' or 'irrelevant' knowledge and learning and thereby to press teachers into reducing their expectations.

Students' responses here appear to resonate with young people's resistance to 'irrelevant' education in other studies (for example, Bates, 1989).

These GNVQ- related effects suggest that teachers committed to critical autonomy will face difficulties. Strong views about 'relevance' and 'usefulness', combined with aversion to difficult subjects, mean that the relevance of evaluating a health campaign is easier to sell to students, for example, than evaluating competing theories in social policy. These and other pressures on teachers explored next may reinforce the comfort zone.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BITING THE BULLET(S)¹: TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO GNVQ ASSESSMENT

Analysis of teachers' responses to GNVQ assessment policy draws on data from the sequence of fieldwork activities with the sample of nine teachers, discussed in Chapter Five. It also draws on responses to the questionnaire returned by 34 (51%) of 60 Advanced GNVQ teachers, discussed in Chapter Five (see also Appendix 14). Coding and strategies for analysing data followed the rationale discussed in Chapter Five.

Section One discusses teachers' goals for developing student motivation and autonomy

Section Two explores the teaching and assessment activities that teachers adopt to realise their goals.

Section Three evaluates the conditions that teachers see as impinging on their goals and activities.

Section Four evaluates new forms of professionalism in FE created by the effects of the GNVQ assessment system on teachers' ability to develop students' motivation and autonomy.

The implications of the findings analysed and evaluated here are drawn out more fully as conclusions in Chapter Nine.

¹ This neat play on words was suggested by Frank Coffield

1. TEACHERS' GOALS

a. Sustaining motivation

All nine teachers in the qualitative sample have been involved with GNVQs for over three years and some of the variables that might affect their views of GNVQ were discussed in Chapter Five. Before outlining their goals and responses to the competing demands they had to reconcile in GNVQs, I summarise teachers' overall views of the GNVQ assessment system before exploring them in more depth. Broadly, two (Neil, unit tutor, and Jim, course leader) were negative, even hostile, about the effects of GNVQ assessment on their own goals for education and on the quality of students' engagement with their subject. Two (Madeline and Caroline, unit tutors) were concerned that GNVQs encourage 'hoop jumping' to get through the assessment. Three (Barbara, unit and personal tutor, Gill, course leader, and Danny, unit tutor were all in the same team) and, until becoming involved with the Capey pilot, were generally positive about the emphasis in GNVQ on 'real life' relevance and students' independence. Two (Mary, course leader and Jo, year tutor) were enthusiastic about GNVQs with minor reservations about some features of the assessment system.

Despite their different roles and responsibilities, teachers believed that students must get 'good' qualifications in a difficult context for jobs and progression to higher education. Eight saw their main aim to help as many students as possible achieve the GNVQ and to help students decide on, and achieve, realistic end goals. Six believed passionately that GNVQs should have parity of esteem with A-levels and were therefore positive about the political aim that GNVQs would improve national standards of achievement. In this respect, they valued GNVQ as more rigorous than its predecessor the BTEC National Diploma. In keeping with hopes for parity of esteem and the need to motivate students who might otherwise not achieve an advanced level qualification, eight teachers were positive that students had clear assessment targets. These aims place them firmly in a tradition of vocational education in FE colleges going back to BTEC National Diplomas,

as well as the CPVE and the BTEC First Diploma.² Three teachers have been immersed in this tradition for over 10 years and for two of them, the goal of a 'second chance' for students within a close-knit group is paramount. Importantly, such goals were intrinsically motivating for teachers' commitment and their sense of professionalism:

I do like vocational education, I like the students once we've had them for a few months and because they're a group you get to know them, and I just love them, I love being in a class with them...and because of the nature of the course, these students come in as 'no-hopers' and seeing themselves, it's written all over their faces 'I'm a failure' and it's so nice when you hear that they've gone onto university. Obviously, some can only go so far and achieve so much, but for some, they find their niche and they make a go of it.
(Barbara, unit and personal tutor, BS).

Although there were similarities in overall aims for students, teachers' specific GNVQ roles affected whether they saw themselves as being directly responsible for helping students gain the qualification. Roles also affected the emphasis that teachers placed on different goals. Five teachers had a pastoral role and prioritised students' personal development, general lifeskills and confidence over subject knowledge or high grades, although the latter were undoubtedly important. Three of these five were also course leaders and this added a pressure to conform to national standards for grading set by awarding bodies³. Three were unit teachers and their aims were more strongly related to subject development and students' personal growth within it.

In the questionnaire sample, teachers were asked to select the 'most worthwhile aim for students in GNVQ'. 47% highlighted students' ability to take more responsibility for managing and evaluating their work as the 'most worthwhile' aim.

² See Chapter One and Appendix One for a summary of these initiatives.

³ This pressure is discussed later. It affects teachers' goals and actions they take to achieve them.

Table 8 Most worthwhile aim for GNVQs

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Take responsibility for managing and evaluating their work	16	47.1	47.1
Become independent learners	12	35.3	35.3
See themselves as 'lifelong learners'	3	8.8	8.8
Work with teachers to set targets, review aims	3	8.8	8.8

Twenty teachers added their own 'most important' aim, and of these, ten prioritised motivation and skills for learning, three prioritised objectivity, rigour and fairness in grading and four wanted as many students as possible to gain the qualification. In the fieldwork sample, six out of nine seemed to prioritise motivation and skills for learning, two emphasised objectivity in grading and gaining the qualification, and one prioritised critical engagement with the subject. Nonetheless, although there were different priorities, it is important to reiterate that individuals had a mix of aims.

Some teachers were profoundly concerned about the pressures that students face in gaining jobs or progressing to higher education. All believed that external pressures have changed the student cohort attracted to GNVQ. This led them to emphasise different goals for sustaining motivation:

at this college, I feel that the students we attract onto the GNVQ course...come from poorer areas and quite often broken families which has led students in some cases having up to 3 part-time jobs and I'm sure that it's my personality but I feel as if I try to and help them and show that I care about their personal lives as well...They can talk to me and it will make them a better and more relaxed student in the classroom. Relaxed as though someone cares about them, not just how they are achieving academically (Jo, Year 1 course leader, BS).

As Barbara's earlier comment shows, teachers' own motivation was a crucial factor in defining their goals for students. Although later sections in this chapter show the pressures of external imperatives, the most important goals remained rooted in their own intrinsic motivation to be teachers. The four with pastoral roles, for example, were committed to building students' personal confidence and motivation and the data show the strength of commitment, illustrated again by Barbara:

I just like the rapport I have with them. I like to be able to talk about their progress, I think it's important. I don't think it's enough just to deliver the curriculum. I care about the students because they come from an environment where they have been looked after and they are in a situation where sometimes they feel on their own and you can lose a student if you don't feel attached to somebody. So I enjoy tutorials from that point of view. (Barbara, unit and personal tutor, BS).

Nevertheless, there was a perception amongst all but one of the sample that social problems were increasingly affecting 'the type of students' that colleges increasingly cater for, particularly in relation to motivation and attitude. External pressures seemed to make teachers, particularly those in pastoral roles, strive hard to maintain motivation and to maximise achievement: *"it's the very least we can do for them"* (Mary, course leader HSC).

From a different perspective, three teachers who were unit tutors without an official pastoral role, talked primarily about the subjects they themselves liked and the need to generate students' interest and confidence in them:

I always remember when I was a student, the teachers used to say 'pick an area that interests you and investigate that, do as much as you can – don't worry if you're not covering everything, but you are doing something that interests you (Danny, unit tutor BS).

It's the subject so I like teaching it and it also gives them an introduction to Psychology which is all the way through the course anyway, so they walk away this term with an idea of perspectives in psychology, a basic understanding and an interest in it....There's two [students] who really do think about the stuff and...you can see them taking in what you're saying and trying to make sense, and when they understand it, yes, that's totally

rewarding and they're asking questions as well, that's just great (Caroline, HSC unit tutor).

In keeping with traditions in the vocational FE curriculum, teachers combined goals for students' personal development and a second chance to achieve a good qualification with a belief that subjects must be directly applicable to real life. Apart from Neil and Caroline, teachers did not discuss the goal of cognitive depth within a subject unless asked. In addition, in keeping with observations in Chapter Three about critical autonomy, ideas about relevance varied according to the unit content and beliefs about the purposes of post-16 education. In overtly vocational units, such as 'Planning a Health Campaign' or 'Communications', 'Planning a Business Activity', 'Human Resources', general life-skills and specific applications of knowledge and information to students' goals for careers were important. In 'Marketing' for example:

I like to give the students a context where they can relate whatever I'm teaching to that context...I try to make them think about their own lives and part-time jobs and I think that's important rather than just giving them theory (Jo, BS)

In units such as 'Psychology' and 'Social Policy', the contentious idea that theories apply directly to the aims of policy makers and to the practice of care workers is written directly into the GNVQ specifications. Both Neil and Caroline disagreed with this assumption of relevance and played it down, emphasising instead the introduction of concepts and ideas as a basis for progression within a body of knowledge. For Neil, the flawed aims of the specifications were inferior to his passionate belief that sociology and social policy are inextricably linked to the purposes of education:

You want to educate people so that they can question what's going on here. Either in their own lives, within their family or within the UK...Okay, you can turn back and say they need the facts and it's pretty difficult to be critical without at least some of the historical information and seeing where we come from and understanding how things work. So you do need facts or factual knowledge because when you start looking at facts, they are so open to interpretation that the actual foundation of factual knowledge starts to splinter (Neil, HSC unit tutor).

Nonetheless, despite different emphases in goals, and despite their own intrinsic professional motivation, teachers believed that, apart from a tiny majority, students were motivated primarily by *external* and *introjected* goals as opposed to *intrinsic* and *interested* motivation in a subject. Perhaps predictably, when students' motivation began to flag during year 2, teachers emphasised external goals and, in particular, the persuasive power of credentialism:

I have said to them 'think long term. What do you want in a few years' time? Do you want a good job with money, or do you want to be where you are now and stay where you are?'. I can't think of anything else. And they look at you and say 'no, I don't want to stay where I am'. (Barbara, personal and unit tutor, BS).

The motivation is always encouraging them to do the best they can and if they do the best they can, they'll get so much more out of life. It's almost telling them to get their qualifications and get themselves to university and get yourself a better job. I try to motivate them to improve themselves (Danny, unit tutor BS).

In contrast to data from student interviews, teachers did not indicate social dimensions to students' motivation such as commitment from some students to their peers' achievement. Instead, teachers saw themselves as minimising friction and managing tensions within diverse groups, including the Advanced GNVQ cohorts, rather than creating opportunities for social commitments. Some also worried that students 'helping each other' was plagiarism or cheating and saw discussion amongst students about assignments as unhelpful competition over grades. Indeed, as data below show, pressures on teachers to ensure reliable grading, combined with their views about the purposes of assessment within student groups, reinforced an individualistic approach to assessment and motivation. In discussing this finding at a seminar towards the end of the study, teachers observed that they did not address the social dynamics of GNVQ groups.

b. Developing autonomy

In the questionnaire sample, although 47% of teachers saw 'students taking more responsibility for managing and evaluating their work' as the '*most worthwhile aim*', they believe that the most *realistic* aim (51%) is for '*students to work with teachers to set*

targets'. The *most difficult aims* were for students to see themselves as lifelong learners (37%) and to become independent learners (47%). This disjuncture suggests that teachers do not see setting targets and reviewing achievement as part of, or synonymous with, taking more responsibility for managing and evaluating work or being independent learners. However, inferences like this are precarious because the questions and responses do not reveal meanings that participants are attaching to notions such as 'independent learning' etc. In addition, the questions reveal the 'shadow cast' (Rogers et al, 1995) by my own understandings and interpretations. In this situation, following up teachers' written responses would be a more valid basis for inferences.

In the qualitative sample, beliefs about important goals and motivators affected the type of autonomy that teachers valued most. As Chapter Seven points out, procedural autonomy is easiest to identify. Data from interviews and participant observations for marking assignments show the extreme pressure teachers were under to conform closely to GNVQ requirements. For all teachers, goals for students' procedural autonomy were part of their professional responsibility to maximise opportunities for achievement. However, there were marked differences in teachers' views about the effects of GNVQ assessment requirements. The section below on 'actions to maintain and enhance goals' shows that the need to develop students' procedural autonomy translates into different actions and responses.

Teachers who were more enthusiastic about GNVQs expressed fewer dilemmas about doing everything possible to get students through the requirements. For them, '*meeting the requirements*' was itself an essential intrinsic goal. In contrast, those who were more negative showed their own *introjected* and *identified* motivation associated with '*getting students through*' or, in two cases, about minimising the impact of the requirements on their teaching and assessment practices. One wanted to subvert the requirements by using his own criteria but, in practice, did not. Thus, in very similar ways to the students, eight teachers used the specific technical language of the assessment system extensively in their everyday discussions about teaching, learning and assessment. The two teachers

most negative about GNVQ assessment hardly used the language at all: when they did, did, they qualified it as '*GNVQ-speak*', thereby symbolising a separation from it.

As well as procedural autonomy, discussion above showed that students' personal autonomy was an explicit goal for eight of the sample. Yet teachers varied in their interpretations of how this was promoted and had different views about what personal autonomy meant and the impact of GNVQ assessment on its development. Thus, Jo, Barbara and Mary saw the development of students' awareness about their strengths and weaknesses within the course, and the ability to manage their lives around GNVQs, as part of a pastoral role as well as permeating their teaching of subject units.

In addition, just as students identified their own ipsative targets for progress, teachers were rewarded by very precise changes in individual students. All nine teachers showed a detailed awareness of individual students, even where unit tutors only had intermittent contact with a group. Teachers valued small steps in students' personal autonomy, in examples of achievement or confidence in particular lessons or assignments:

Tracey [student in the sample] is a quiet student and she'll struggle on without asking and she'll not ask if there's a big group and she'll not ask me while the rest are here, but the other day she caught me by myself in the Learning Centre and had a few things she wanted to ask me (Danny, BS, unit tutor)

Another student designed a questionnaire for a unit on statistics and administered it in a supermarket:

I didn't expect her to do that. I thought she would confine it to college or perhaps home and friends...she has gone out off her own bat, gone up to people and spoken to people. She wouldn't have been able to do that two years ago (Barbara, unit and personal tutor, BS)

Signs of engagement and students' (very rare) confidence to ask subject-related questions or to challenge subject-related claims were rewards for Caroline and Neil. Two other teachers related personal development to confidence with the GNVQ requirements themselves. For Mary, a pastoral role to develop awareness of strengths and weaknesses focused on the precise demands of the assessment system:

The tutorial part is getting them aware of what's expected in the GNVQ, how to perform within the GNVQ in their assignments because a lot of them have come from school and they are unaware of what is required in GNVQ, so we have done a lot of assessment at the beginning...It's really linking everything up, it is like a pastoral role that we are doing for them.

None of the teachers related the idea of personal autonomy to general education. And, although Neil defined it more generally, he saw numerous barriers to his role in developing it. In discussing the card sort activity of constructs relating to autonomy, he pointed out that:

I wouldn't suggest I would go anywhere near personal autonomy. When I am taking two hours a week for one semester, that's a term and a bit. If I never met them before, and the chances are that I haven't, I don't even know them so I have got no chance of trying to understand who they are as people and then suggest and encourage ways of living which I think is what personal autonomy is about. It's about how you approach life. That never enters the consciousness.

From a narrower, course-related perspective, Danny recognised that students may set their own limits to achieving their best, but saw boundaries to his role:

I feel as if it is the job to deliver the subject content and not really to dictate what they do in their lives. You do say things like 'well don't go out at the weekend'⁴ but that's just a general comment. [Reads one of the card sort statements]: 'recognising strengths and weaknesses in all aspects of their lives': again, that's going beyond the subject area that I feel I'm trained in, and in terms of the time I've got, it's just beyond me being able to do that

As with the students, questions about what types of autonomy teachers valued in GNVQ elicited general notions such as '*students going off and doing their own work*', '*going to the Learning Centre without being told*', '*spreading their wings in the local community*'. And, as discussion about personal autonomy shows above, teachers valued a myriad of small and large steps towards autonomy. However, combining the fieldwork activities discussed in Chapter Five enabled precise examples of aims for critical autonomy, and conditions affecting its development, to emerge. The most obvious examples appeared in subjects where students' ability to think, question and challenge is part of a particular

critical, academic tradition which teachers themselves have experienced and internalised. The sociology and psychology examples above were therefore inextricably linked to the two teachers' personal commitment to particular educational goals and to their own induction into them. For them, critical autonomy is about students '*being able to think for themselves*' and '*being wary of common-sense*'.

In other subjects, examples of critical autonomy were much more precise:

We have been doing the European unit and I think there is scope to look at current topical issues and I have asked them to try and think of some. Some have come back and they have had newspaper articles on the BSE and the Euro. So it's starting to work a little bit (Barbara pastoral and unit tutor, BS).

It's important to see both sides of the coin...it's something we touched on years ago in the teacher training, teaching controversial subjects and how to handle that. ...It could be personal and social education as we did some different issues on flexible working and the problems with that and people being used on a flexible basis and asking 'is it good for them, and does it fit in with their lifestyle'? (Danny, unit tutor, BS).

Some teachers related possibilities for critical autonomy even more specifically to individual students and the topics that students choose for assignments:

[Reading out a statement in the card sort]: '*able to challenge taken for granted assumptions*'. Again, depending on what they're being taught and who they are, I would get them to challenge. I think it's very difficult to for them to challenge assumptions if it's not in the news or not something that's happening at the moment...for example, the breast cancer campaign because private companies are now selling breast cancer awareness pens, t-shirts. That would be a taken-for-granted assumption, that they coin money in [from these activities] (Mary, course leader HSC).

⁴ He means if assignment deadlines are looming!

2. TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

a. Responding to assessment requirements

The typology of autonomy and assessment practices discussed in Chapter Three identifies three views of knowledge that might underpin teachers' formative assessment practices within everyday classroom activities and in more obvious assessment activities like marking work and giving students feedback. These are reiterated briefly here:

- *transmission* of content, procedures and requirements, linked to assessment which tracks and checks that these are covered
- *transaction* over content and processes, linked to discussion of assessment criteria and negotiation of appropriate evidence of achievement
- *transformation* of ideas and knowledge, linked to robust, diagnostic questioning in class and tutorials, together with feedback and strategic uses of ipsative, self and peer assessment.

Depending on how teachers viewed their role, and the effects of GNVQ assessment requirements, transmission of knowledge arose from the assessment specifications themselves or the demands of teachers' subject specialism. At the same time, teachers were committed to maximising students' chances of passing whilst maintaining the integrity of the grades they awarded. As the section below on 'conditions' shows, this created profound tensions for some in the sample.

The two teachers most committed to the aims and structures of the GNVQ requirements talked of transmitting subject content and enthusing students to be interested in it, but appeared to prioritise "*drumming the demands*" of the GNVQ system into students "*from day one*" (Mary, course leader, HSC). In two observed lessons with Jo, for example, she adopted the same enthusiastic, coaxing approach to students compiling their portfolio for

the impending visit of the external verifier as she did for engaging their interest in her unit subjects. Six teachers incorporated the assessment requirements in their teaching, referring frequently to the language of the criteria within lessons, as well as more generally to processes of 'tracking', 'covering', 'listing', 'tracking' and 'hitting the bullets'. Phrasing from the criteria also appeared in their written feedback on assignments.

Yet there were strong differences in structures and systems for helping (or making) students meet (or get through) the requirements and these seemed to reflect the attitudes of teachers towards them. Thus, in three of the four courses, tutorials were a compulsory part of the GNVQ, with pre-booked appointments, expectations of attendance, official recording systems and written reports to parents. In these courses, targets were set around the specifications and teaching and assessment activities emphasised their transmission. In contrast, the course leader for the 1995 model tried to interpret its spirit of independence as a voluntary, self-directed approach to booking tutorials and compiling evidence for the portfolio. But, at the end of year 1, numerous notices appeared on the department's walls with managerial-style warnings and sanctions for compulsory review and portfolio-building sessions, letters home about non-attendance and a disappointed, directive tone in the resulting, poorly-attended session I observed.

In contrast to this extensive transmission of requirements and its management through formal systems, the original GNVQ model was supposed to allow students and teachers to negotiate assignment content and process and to review achievement in relation to the criteria. As Chapters One and Six showed, numerous problems with these aims have produced the more directive, externally-monitored model of the Capey pilot. Predictably, then, teachers' transaction in this study focused extensively on how to achieve the requirements or on the technical logistics of doing assignments. Of thirteen observed lessons for eight teachers, there was substantial negotiation in seven of them about the balance of time to be spent on an assignment in the lesson itself and about the specifications.

Further constraints on the type of transaction that was possible appeared when marking students' work. As Chapter Seven showed, students marked precise points where they 'hit' the individual criteria for Pass, Merit and Distinction. In marking the assignments, a logical response for teachers was to 'track and check', seeking out words and phrases that confirmed achievement. In marking a Psychology assignment, Caroline and I had problems with a student whose creative 'stream of consciousness' approach did not lend itself to this auditing approach:

What I tend to do is mark these pass points, P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5 and then, as I'm going through, try to match up what [students] say with the bullet points but it doesn't allow for something which is in the air like this. I'm not saying she has not got it because I think when I read it, she did have, the same as you thought, but it is not easy to match to this (Caroline, unit tutor, HSC).

We spent time discussing how Annette's work met the criteria but eventually referred it back so that she could make achievement more explicit. I marked 50 assignments in total (5 from each of 10 units) and in each unit, most students had to repeat parts of assignments more than once in order for them to meet the criteria for a Pass.

In our joint marking of Social Policy assignments, Neil contrasted his usual more holistic approach to a parody of marking to the 'logic' of GNVQs:

Instead of doing it holistically, let's do it in the model of GNVQs. That is, let's go through and just check if she [student] has got all these things [the bullets]. They might assemble it by going through – 'I'll put that in, I'll put that in, that in'. I'll go through and check the same without reading it!

Gill also resented not being able to assess students' work holistically. Discussing her marking with me on another occasion led her to see how the marking system was 'conditioning' her approach:

As a result of our discussion last time, it made me realise why I was having major problems with the marking and feedback, so now I have accepted that it's just the bullets. So as a consequence, now I am conditioned. I still like to read to get the overview, but

now I realise there isn't always an overview, and then just to look purely at the bullets, and if you haven't got the bullet, well, you have just got to do it.

In keeping with the effects of transmitting the requirements and the transaction over these, there were few overt examples of transforming learning or knowledge. However, two observed lessons (Social Policy and Psychology) showed a robust, exploratory approach to questioning aimed to help students develop their understanding of the subject. This technique arose from Neil and Caroline's aims for critical autonomy outlined above and they designed questions to 'make the students think'.

Despite these aims and their translation into assessment criteria for the two unit assignments, marking assignments showed how hard it was, even for the most motivated students, to gain the depth and criticality demanded by the criteria. Problems in other assignments were exemplified in the Social Policy example here:

It's the nature of GNVQ, it's the nature of this assignment that students think it's about gathering as much data as possible. It's the equivalent of going into an exam and writing all you know about something without structuring it. And you can get a pass at A-level with that. Just like you can get a pass at GNVQ. You don't have to be coherent to pass, so if you don't need to be coherent, you don't do it. They only do what they need to do. (Neil, unit tutor).

b. Assessment and learning

In parallel to students' views about assessment as external, summative judgements of evidence, none of the teachers saw assessment explicitly shaping or affecting learning. Indeed, the most difficult questions to justify to them during fieldwork were related to my attempts to explore the activities they classed as 'assessment' and how they perceived the purpose of questions in class or tutorials. As one pointed out: "*you keep on referring to things as 'assessment' that I see as 'teaching'*". Assessment was associated with marking assignments, collecting evidence of achievement and tests. Formative and diagnostic assessment, such as systematic classroom questioning where teachers constructed understanding by building on students' answers, and questions in a tutorial to get students to reflect on learning were not associated with assessment. Data from all the

fieldwork activities therefore bear out the prediction from other research on formative assessment, discussed in Chapter Three, that most teachers do not connect assessment with everyday formative and diagnostic activities that can enhance learning.

Instead, assessment for four teachers in the sample is, overtly, a time-consuming, solitary and boring chore. Teachers' rooms were full of student files and portfolios and teachers carried a high and frequent marking load. As the next section shows, official scrutiny has made it a source of increasing anxiety for teachers. In response to my question about his approach to marking, Neil presented his view of a common professional attitude:

Assessment is, I think for many teachers, probably the least thought about, the thing they find the least interesting. Everyone complains about marking, everyone. It doesn't matter if you are teaching A-level or GNVQ, anything, we all hate marking. It's no fun. You do it on your own, you are thinking 'what the hell are they on about, what have I taught them?'...So we hate it really and I don't think, as teachers, we give it enough thought. I certainly don't.

In keeping with this, teachers' written assessment comments were largely brief summative confirmations of meeting or missing 'the bullets'. However, a key aim of the participant observation was to explore approaches to marking and feedback as indicators of teachers' ideas about the purposes of assessment and its implicit or overt links to ideas about learning. Although they did not see their feedback ticks and comments on work as 'assessment', six teachers provided oral feedback to individuals. Three (Barbara, Gill and Jo) had educational rationales for their approach to feedback and hoped that students would respond to their questions or queries. When we marked an assignment for an unconfident student who had made many mistakes, Gill explained her sparing written comments and her emphasis, instead, on one-to-one feedback:

If I write everything [that's wrong] on here, it's soul-destroying and hence I tend to mark in pencil because I don't like to get things back covered in red ink myself

She and Barbara had a similar precise approach: “*no crosses, always questions*” and what I observed during the post-assessment interview as her “*wiggly lines, circles and straight lines*” on specific parts of the text. Gill had a strong memory of her own experience as a student and saw the effects of feedback on students’ identity as learners:

I went through as a mature student and I know the things that had a big impact and I hated the very first piece of work I got with red ink on. And so consequently, I won't inflict it on anybody else. I think you can just as easily see that something is incorrect by the question mark. You can explain it but then once it's explained, that's it, it's not for the rest of the world to see that you did something wrong....It's between you and the student. And I think in many ways it builds up a relationship with the student and the student has confidence that you are wanting what's best for them rather than promoting their weaknesses

For Gill, Barbara and Jo, feedback was an opportunity to convey their own educational goals to students and to build a relationship with them. If teachers prioritised goals of confidence and personal development, asking students too many questions in class or giving negative comments harmed these goals. Gill’s approach also showed the limits to meaning that can be conveyed without writing the dispiriting detail that she, and also Barbara, believed would be needed to help students understand what is wrong. They argued that a few written words made students believe they understood what might be wrong with their work when, in reality, they did not. In keeping with their commitment to students’ personal progress and stage of development during the course, these three teachers tailored their comments carefully.

In contrast, lack of time for face to face feedback made written comments necessary:

I break each task down and if they haven't managed to achieve something under the evidence criteria, I explain to them because often you don't get a chance to explain one on one with them and say 'you need to do this and that' and I try to make it as detailed as possible. (Caroline)

More direct feedback on weaknesses, particularly for under-achieving students, arose from a good relationship rather than an overt strategy for giving feedback. In another marking exercise, I commented on Jo's approach:

K: You have put here "you have only scraped through!!" and...you have quite a personal way of saying things....Is that a deliberate style on your part?

Jo: No, that's just me. It's not something I've been taught, or something I've learned, it's just the way I am. I normally start with positive and if there's anything negative to say, sandwich that between two positive comments...I'm very careful based on the relationship with the student, because some students do take it the wrong way

Another parallel to students' views about the purposes of assessment was teachers' own reluctance to use self-assessment, other than students 'checking the bullets' before handing work in. None of the teachers saw peer or self-assessment as appropriate or possible. Although time constraints were a barrier, teachers also worried that unconfident students would be exposed:

In terms of reading each other's work, I think it's too much to ask of the students (Danny, unit tutor)

I don't encourage students to look at each other's final grades because I think it might be de-motivating for them...especially if they are close friends. I have a situation like that in my 1st year, two girls that hang round together, one is a distinction and the other is pushing a pass...I think in cases like that it's de-motivating (Jo, unit tutor).

In addition to a view that students were unsure of peer judgements about their work, some teachers saw students' views about the teacher's assessment role as the barrier:

They would probably think 'I haven't done very well on that one and I don't want someone else criticising it because he is just one of my peers'. I think they look upon the tutor as the main person who can give the best feedback and they don't want a critical analysis here from someone they see on the same level (Barbara, unit and personal tutor).

Some teachers saw lack of maturity and underlying divisions within groups as a problem:

I have never done [peer assessment]. In the groups I am with, there is a lot of animosity between them, and I think for some kids, it would simply be an excuse to have a go at another kid and some would not be able to stand it (Neil, unit tutor).

The questionnaire showed mixed views about the effects of the GNVQ assessment criteria on teachers' assessment practices. Although 59% of respondents said that the criteria had 'made them a better marker', 48% said they did not provide comments to extend students' thinking into new areas of interest. This suggests, tentatively, that 'better marking' may mean more consistent in line with the objectives. In addition, there are strong hints of negative or at least neutral effects of GNVQs assessment on marking since 23.5 % 'strongly disagreed' and 17% 'disagreed' that the criteria had made them better markers. However, the caveats above about 'shadow cast effects' and the limited insights gained from attempts to explore ideas and views through questionnaires obviously apply here.

Table 9 Using the criteria has made me a better marker

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Strongly disagree	6	17.6%	17.6%
Disagree	8	23.5%	23.5%
Agree	18	52.9%	52.9%
Strongly agree	2	5.9%	5.9%

The college-based fieldwork suggests reasons why extra comments became superfluous although it does not reveal what type of comments teachers might have given before they experienced GNVQs.⁵ Nevertheless, seven of the sample felt that GNVQs had made their marking instrumental and more boring than before. Importantly, those who had developed personal approaches to feedback felt obliged to adopt a tracking and checking approach. It is not therefore surprising that, in a context where assessment is synonymous with summative evidence and judgements, and where motivation, commitment and ability vary greatly within student groups, teachers did not see self and peer assessment as potentially diagnostic or formative. Although, as Chapter Three

showed, this is likely to have been a view they had already, to teachers in this study, the GNVQ model implies another summative burden on students. Teachers' actions to maintain or enhance their goals for students' progress were therefore heavily influenced by the GNVQ requirements. This suggests that assessment for learning will also be shaped in particular ways.

3. CONDITIONS AFFECTING ACTIVITIES AND GOALS

a. Conforming to national standards for grading

The most important factor influencing teachers' responses to GNVQ assessment and its impact on their goals for students was the effect of new moves by QCA and awarding bodies to secure 'national standards' of grading, discussed in Chapter Six. It is significant that anxiety to meet national standards was virtually absent amongst the two teachers using the 1995 model who never referred to 'national standards' during the two years of fieldwork. In contrast, six teachers using the Capey pilot model showed high levels of anxiety about meeting these standards and used the phrase 'national standards' often.

As the examples of marking assignments showed above, attending standards' moderation meetings made teachers nervous. One team in the study received a 'D' (low) grade for their grading from the awarding body's national moderation exercise for the set assignment. This had a profoundly negative effect on teachers' confidence to trust their judgements about students' work and they were concerned to 'get it right'⁶. This entailed learning the official procedures to ensure consistency both within the team and when

⁵ Discussion here indicates the value of combining methods. It would be useful to go back to respondents and explore notions like 'better marker' or respondents' perceptions of the purposes of feedback comments.

⁶ The event undoubtedly had a profound significance but the importance of timing in qualitative research, mentioned in the last chapter, is crucial. A year later, familiarity with the moderation process gained the team an 'A' and confidence returned. In the final year of the study, another visit by the moderator produced a lower grade and indignation was, again, extreme. Grading by awarding bodies was extensive: 'key skills' in GNVQs were graded across the college and each subject was also graded. And, this was in addition to FEFC inspection grades every four years!

exposed to a wider professional community at national meetings. The process had a profound effect, as Danny's stream of indignation shows:

It is upsetting when it comes back from somewhere way up high that you are a 'D' and you have been marking like this for many years. Here I am, a 'D', I know these students better than anyone else, I have seen them produce the work, I have gone through exactly the same criteria as anyone else, I got the D33 and D32, I didn't need them to do this but I got them⁷ and all of a sudden, I am a 'D'. If they think that, then why don't they take it [marking] out of our hands completely?

But despite scepticism, anger and disappointment, such procedures had a resolute official status. Teachers were told at regional moderation meetings that Distinction grades were equivalent to an 'A' in A-levels. There was therefore pressure to raise achievements overall whilst keeping Distinction grades to acceptable levels. As Barbara and I marked assignments, she recalled a way of gaining consistency:

We all sat round a table and the facilitator knew nothing about Business and that was the idea, he didn't want to sway us one way or another and we had to thrash it out around the table and come out with a pass, merit or distinction which we found very difficult to do...we just couldn't, and then we all started on about who had got the first grade [from the awarding body] and one centre had got an 'A' and everyone was 'how did you get an 'A'? ... and what [the course leader] had done was taken every bullet point and wrote it down and gave it to the students separately and that's how they'd done it....and we said 'that's not the general idea'....I don't think he let the students see the assignment, he just gave it to them a task at a time.

By year 2 of the study, her team adopted this approach for some assignments, to get students through them. Slowly, 'the general idea' that Barbara referred to above, namely a tradition in vocational education of designing what Danny, Barbara and Gill all referred to as 'nice assignments' (real-life projects incorporating a number of themes and skills) was being replaced. Instead, teachers either broke up the scenario around the bullet points or, in one unit, asked students simply to collect evidence against the bullets. Some teachers learnt from Standards Moderation meetings that they could not help the students,

⁷ The ubiquitous 'D' units (D32, 33 and 34) are part of an NVQ in training and cover competence-based assessment requirements. The NCVQ's requirement that staff in NVQs and, for a short time, GNVQs, must acquire them has absorbed much of colleges' staff development budgets over the last ten years (FEFC, 2000c).

that they must merely let them collect the evidence. There was confusion whether this instruction applied to the QCA externally-set assignments or to all coursework.

The logic of conforming to this auditing process was therefore reinforced heavily by instructions from awarding body verifiers. The process was effective in transmitting requirements to teachers:

K: What struck me when I was reading and then marking the assignments is that if you were to track the PCs⁸ into this, it would take you hours⁹.

C: Hours, and this is what they expect you to do. When I have been to Standards Moderation, they expect you to track it and through to P1 etc...they were saying 'well, where, show me where P2 is, where is the sentence?'. So in fact a student could write a sentence for this and get it.

The transmission of rules for marking tightened up interpretation of what individual criteria meant for the set assignments. During a formal internal moderation of a set assignment for Health and Social Care with two teachers, we discussed whether students had met the criterion '*identify primary, secondary and tertiary aspects of the existing campaign*'¹⁰:

Jane: Do you think just a small sentence like that is enough? Some of the girls have done beautiful presentations on that aspect, but some of them have just put a sentence and that's it.

Mary: 'To identify' is just a list. The Standards' Moderation that I went to, a list is six objects.

Similarly, Caroline in the other college, picked up the official line that 'identify' meant a list. She also experienced the difficulty indicated above about how much detail to accept:

⁸ Although rapidly au fait becoming familiar with the language, I'm using 'PCs' (performance criteria) from the 1995 model and not 'the bullets' I should be referring to here in order to be a credible assessor in the Capey model!

⁹ Striving for genuine participant observation, where I was as an authentic GNVVQ assessor as possible, made non-directive questioning very difficult and the transcripts show more of a normal professional conversation than other interviews and the constructivist approach advocated by Knight and Saunderson (1999).

Every little thing has to be assessed, but, saying that, someone could put a sentence for each one of these [bullet points] and get a 'D'.

In keeping with this positivist precision, teachers were also directed how to differentiate 'identify', 'explain' and 'describe': for example, 'explain' had to be in prose but was more in-depth than 'describe'. The "*bottomless pit of absolute precision*" (Winter, 1993) noted in Chapter Four, is confirmed here. Pressures to ensure consistency were reinforced by students' perceptions that 'extra' dimensions to assignments were 'irrelevant' (see Chapter Seven). Discussion of teachers' responses here also explains students' views of bullets as separate 'tasks', their cumulative approach to meeting the criteria and their resentment if asked to go beyond 'the bullets'. Nevertheless, as marking shows, if students did not closely follow the criteria, teachers had to refer work back to fill gaps.

Teachers responded in different ways. One team was anxious to conform to national consistency but was concerned about the effect that this had on students. In our joint marking of a 'Finance' assignment, Gill and I discussed how GNVQs affect students' responses to assessment:

G: Well if it had been [BTEC] this assignment would still not have achieved ...but I think, had it been the old system, there would have been a possibility that Joanne would have put greater emphasis on her written bit, knowing that her [mathematical] ratios were the problem. But it wouldn't have retrieved it.

K: So in one way you can say that the GNVQ is forcing her to do the ratios to pass.¹¹

G: (emphatically) Forcing her to fail...she would have still had to add to the ratios but she would have been in a stronger position...they just know they have got to pass all of these [bullet points] and so they look at it and think 'oh, horror story'...

¹⁰ I marked this set assignment with staff in both colleges and there was a strong consistency in both the students' approaches to the tasks and the teachers' interpretations of grades.

¹¹ This question is trying to explore her views of the idea of GNVQ designers, that defining outcomes and requiring 100% coverage would raise 'standards'.

Teachers were caught between wanting to allow students to develop confidence and skills around valid, relevant assignments where achievement could build up over a whole course, and the de-motivating impact of resubmitting atomised bits of assignments in order to pass. The competing pressures outlined here led all seven teachers in the sample using the Capey model to break assignments into easily assessable tasks.

b. Negotiating different ‘assessment communities’

Discussion in Chapter Three of how teachers and students learn the quality of work implied in assessment criteria showed that both parties need to see themselves as members of a ‘community of practice’ which can negotiate openly what the criteria mean, using a range of formative and diagnostic assessments. I argued in Chapter Seven that it is possible to see GNVQ groups as communities of practice since they are cohesive and shape students’ expectations about learning in particular ways over the two years of a GNVQ.

However, examples above of marking assignments show that teachers were caught between loyalties to different communities. Those who taught diverse groups at different levels engaged with numerous communities. And, apart from course leaders and personal tutors, unit tutors saw GNVQ students sporadically and for a short time. Importantly, as well as negotiating the specific norms and expectations of each student ‘community of practice’, teachers had to relate to a wider professional community created by the emphasis on ‘national standards’ of grading in GNVQs. For the teachers in the study, this shift in quality assurance procedures represented a fundamental culture change in vocational education (see Ecclestone and Hall, 1999) ¹².

This external dimension to professional communities of practice affected teachers’ attitudes to assessment. Instead of one awarding body moderator visiting a team each year to review work and discuss ways of improving the course, the QCA required

¹² This research project for the QCA on quality assurance and quality control systems in different qualifications confirms the extent to which new approaches to verification and moderation of grades signify a profound culture change for relationships between GNVQ teachers and awarding bodies.

awarding bodies to administer a complex and intensive ‘scrutiny’ programme based on national moderation of assignments. In the Capey model, teachers could no longer establish what grades meant within their teams, taking into account the particular needs of their students, and then negotiating these with a moderator. Indeed, as Chapter Six argued, a crucial political dimension to a bid for parity of esteem with A-levels was that GNVQs had to move away from this ‘soft’ approach. As the example of new procedures where awarding bodies graded teachers’ grading showed above, this process was disconcerting for some teachers in this study.

Nevertheless, it is important to relate these new monitoring processes to other ‘micro disciplinary’ practices, discussed in Chapter Two. The combination of public grading by the awarding body of a team’s grading and messages about ‘doing it wrong’ had powerful parallels in the effects of college inspections or the visits to college by awarding body officials. Teachers symbolised distance by referring to external officials as ‘*The Moderator*’ or ‘*Inspectors*’.

External interventions in teachers’ familiar communities of practice, such as inspection and awarding body procedures, therefore affected teachers’ perceptions of their professionalism. Effects varied, depending on traditions teachers were familiar with. For teachers moving from an A-level moderation culture, being scrutinised was not problematic in itself, but being directly accountable to students for the grades they give them was. As both Neil and Madeline pointed out, giving students a poor grade could make relationships with them very difficult: ‘*you have to live with the students for a year*’.

In contrast, external monitoring gave some teachers professional status and the chance to influence these processes. Mary, for example, was involved in external groups, such as subject advisory groups in NCVQ/QCA. For teachers enthusiastic about GNVQ, being in a wider community was professionally motivating¹³. Nevertheless, gaining support for

¹³ This has a strong resonance with my own experience of CPVE in the local authority where I worked, where regional and national networking were encouraged – and funded!

the decisions this networking brought was not easy and less enthusiastic colleagues back at college felt regulated and scrutinised.

A further dimension to negotiating new roles within a closely monitored assessment system was the power exerted by the specifications themselves. Four teachers questioned the way that unit writers have decided on content. In particular, two disagreed strongly with assumptions written into HSC units that, for example, practitioners and policy makers apply psychological and sociological theories to policy and practice in care and welfare sectors. As responses to the assessment criteria show above, teachers could not use this disagreement as a basis for discussion with students and therefore had no room for manoeuvre. Nor did they have any avenue for professional discussion with specification writers.

b. Student norms and expectations

Despite some teachers' reservations about the negative effects of GNVQ assessment, most of the teachers' sample accepted that students needed '*more hoops to jump through*' because of the '*reality of the student intake*'. Nevertheless, there were mixed views about whether the quality of student intakes was declining in FE. The teacher, for example, who was enthusiastic about GNVQs saw her groups as '*used to what's needed*' and therefore '*better students*'. Other teachers were much less positive about the calibre of students compared to the past and, outside the small sample of students chosen as motivated and autonomous, all but one teacher had fairly negative views about many of the students' attitudes and ability

Teachers' expectations of what they could 'realistically' expect students to do in terms of assignments and general engagement were also influenced by students' expectations that GNVQ systems within college should fit around other commitments, particularly substantial part-time employment.. These constraints were reinforced by resource pressures on time to prepare and 'get through' all the content and assignments, alongside

managers' staffing allocations, designated teaching contact and 'learning time' for students to spend in the Learning Centres.

More subtle pressures arose when some students questioned a need to do more than meet the demands of 'the bullets'. One example raised issues about students' responses to particular aims for autonomy, particularly in units they found 'difficult' or 'irrelevant'. Despite the confusion of content and structure in the unit specifications, Neil continued in his attempts to introduce students to the wider context of social policy. By year 2 of the study, students overtly resisted any content not relevant to the assignment, and would not wait for '*the bigger picture*':

That takes a bit of patience and I don't think GNVQ generates patience because they are dying to get out there and do the project, do the assignment. They can't wait to get some knowledge, they want to pick up the books and immediately find the bullet points

In terms of student motivation, he saw the students responding to:

things that are close to them, and that they can readily understand and see as being readily relevant. So when you look at something I've been teaching, none of these things seem to apply, apart from that it is part of the qualification so they can't see the relevance of an overview of social policy.

It became easier for Neil to allow students to meet the requirements than to continue trying to motivate them to engage with difficult content. He therefore stopped teaching to the Distinction criteria and allowed students to opt out of content not related to the topic they chose for their assignment. This was the only such incident in the study. However, in a modular assessment system based upon a drive to maximise consistency of grading, it appeared to signify the potential fate of content, teachers or demands that students might resist.

c. Internal college systems

Further pressure arose from managerial requirements to use college-wide systems to raise levels of achievement, measured by grades. In Bridgeview, a system of 'learning managers' to bring students up to grades predicted from GSCE scores was introduced in the second year of the fieldwork as part of the second major restructuring of the college in three years, explained here by Danny:

Dave came in and gave out [little pink slips] and said 'Right, you're going to see Bill Smith at a certain time next week' and they all ask what the slips are for and Lisa sat there and said 'it's because we're all underachieving' and the rest were asking why they didn't have them, so it's picking out the underachievers

K: Did she mind? Did she say it in a resentful or cross way?

D: I think more of a resigned way that 'yes, I'm underachieving and if this what I've got to do then this is what I've got to do'...she has the attitude of 'I'm going to pass' whereas, based on the GSCE score, she comes out with a merit

These emerging pressures on students to go beyond the minimal goals that some of them set for themselves led some to internalise the official language of 'underachievement' and to be resigned to other interventions:

We got told when you were 18 and over, everything got sent to you and Business Study teachers have written on the top 'parent or guardian'. I think they are trying to do that so that your parents will help motivate you (Stephen, year 2, BS, Bridgeview).

4. NEW FORMS OF PROFESSIONALISM

a. 'Embedded transmitters', 'strategic transactors' and 'embittered transformers'

This chapter has shown the extent to which GNVQ teachers in the study had to reconcile the new demands of a centrally-regulated assessment system with a myriad of conflicting pressures. In particular, the effects of the assessment requirements on their practices

tested their beliefs and values about vocational education, as did students' expectations, resource constraints and pressures for 'national standards' of grading. In response, one college introduced a monitoring system to raise students' grades and increase retention.

In response to pressures, some teachers (Neil, Caroline, Barbara and Gill) struggled to transform the specifications to fit particular beliefs. Caroline and Neil aimed for students to achieve subject-based notions of critical autonomy as well as a firm footing in their subjects. Gill and Barbara adapted their pastoral approach to personal autonomy in order to get students through the qualification. As Barbara became more confident with the criteria, she found new ways to be more creative, attributing her new confidence to the second grading exercise during the study when her team got an 'A' from the awarding body. Others, like Jo and Mary, were positive and enthusiastic in their transmission of the requirements. They transacted pro-actively in order to maximise student achievement in line with the specifications. Danny and Madeline appeared to transmit and transact pragmatically rather than enthusiastically.

The extent to which teachers experienced dissonance in reconciling their values and beliefs with GNVQ requirements seemed to depend, in part, on their experience of other traditions before GNVQs, but also on their sense of status. The two most positive teachers (Jo and Mary) were relatively new to vocational education and saw a career in FE ahead of them. In contrast, Neil was moved from A-levels to GNVQ in a college restructuring while Jim was displaced from a middle management role. Barbara, Gill, Danny, Jim and Madeline had strong roots in BTEC National and wanted to continue a tradition of vocationally-relevant, integrated assignments and pastoral care.

These pressures created a creeping consistency in practices, alongside compliance. With some bitterness, Neil abandoned some of his strongly held views about critical autonomy and gave into student resistance, while other teachers in the Capey model worked closely to the demands of the bullets. The 1995 model did not have the same effects and teachers did not talk about 'compliance'. The political aim for reliable grading, and the diverse pressures on teachers and students discussed so far, made reductionism to achieve

consistency an entirely logical professional response. Writing 'nice assignments' or pushing students to 'think differently' became risky strategies. In addition, it is essential not to underestimate teachers' deep commitment to student achievement in a precarious context of competition for jobs and uncertain progression to higher education.

Nevertheless, as research on teachers' responses to change, discussed in Chapter Two, also shows, some teachers in the study experienced profound role dilemmas when their creativity and goals were deflected from teaching and building rapport with students towards devising new strategies to cope with assessment. Neil and Jim were less compliant and had not internalised a rationale for changing their practices: in their study of two colleges, Ainley and Bailey (1998) argue that college managers often label such teachers as 'marginal performers' since they reject 'official' rationales for change¹⁴. Both Neil and Jim saw themselves as 'battling' for educational values in a context of hard-edged managerialism. In contrast, the two who were positive about GNVQs and a career in FE enjoyed finding solutions to dilemmas created by change and pursued improvements enthusiastically.

In subtle ways, then, teachers responded differently to the micro-disciplinary practices taking hold in the two colleges. New, more remote forms of regulation for moderation and assessment in GNVQ were especially influential, particularly where teachers did not experience other assessment systems with different underpinning principles. Within GNVQs, teachers came to see an in-built logic to more guidance and standardisation and 'played the system'. In similar ways to the students, teachers developed strategic responses, such as being 'watertight' in complying with set, externally-moderated assignments whilst loosening up in others. To offset some responsibility for what was required, teachers told students 'it's what the moderator/QCA wants'. In turn, awarding

¹⁴ At a seminar to discuss findings, teachers discussed how they felt about these and other labels discussed in Chapter Five. They believed that labels helped them to identify strategies for dealing with change that they might otherwise not know they had! They also found student labels useful. In discussing the ethical issue raised by researchers (including me in this study) finding neat, sometimes 'clever' labels for behaviours and responses, they felt that the motives of researchers and careful presentation of labels prevent them being patronising.

body moderators told teachers to complain to the QCA about problems with set assignments.

In relation to the role of formative assessment in enhancing motivation and encouraging students to reflect more deeply on their learning, none of the sample had read Jessup's early advice (1994). Instead, teachers derived their interpretations from the specifications and their existing understanding about assessment. The fate of official guidance paralleled experience in schools:

Guidance from [examination board] simply made the forms and purposes of, and the distinctions between teacher assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment more unclear. Instead, many schools, tired of receiving more and more documentation, filed these support packs and remained oblivious to there being a distinct definition or purpose of formative assessment (teacher cited in Pryor and Torrance, 1999).

This chapter also shows that perspectives suggested by Malen and Knapp (see Chapter Four) can illuminate how a particular policy shapes teachers' aims, actions and the conditions affecting these:

- normative (values and beliefs about vocational education, professional goals)
- rational/technical (the strong technical hold that the specifications exerted over teachers' language and practices)
- organisational (the different ways that staff team and college structures and systems interacted with demands from awarding body, inspection systems and expectations amongst students)
- political (the ways that teachers accounted for the normative tensions they experience, such as the effects of local conditions on student intake, or restructuring on teachers resources and motivation)
- personal (the effect, in one college, of 'the moderator', although other personalities did not appear influential).

Two themes dominated teachers' perspectives in this study; the technical *irrationality* of the imperatives of the assessment system and the dilemmas that irrationality created for their normative values about the purposes of vocational education. All but two teachers experienced unsettling dissonance when the two dimensions clashed. An organisational theme appears amongst teachers who brought values and beliefs from experience with BTEC or A-levels. Teachers' organisational commitments were to groups of students and a course team, an awarding body or, in two cases, a subject discipline. There was no positive or overt organisational commitment to either college in the study, although the management ethos in each college was influential. There is a sense in the study that teachers were negotiating roles between these different organisational cultures.

The most powerful symbolism in the interview data was the extent that official language permeated teachers' discussion and their indignation at the perceived irrationality and pace of change.

Chapter Six showed that political pressures on GNVQ assessment requirements have created a complex, contradictory assessment system. In turn, this has been communicated to teachers erratically and through many layers of interpretation. Except for one teacher who was active in GNVQ networks, teachers gained their interpretations of official aims for GNVQ assessment procedures from colleagues (what Neil called the 'rumour machine'), the specifications, visits by awarding body officials and FEFC inspectors, and from colleagues' interpretations of decisions from moderation meetings¹⁵. Student and teacher data showed that interpretations of criteria and notions of autonomy embedded within them, were, like the traditions of 'progressivism' that Bates et al discuss, "*subject to shifting justifications in response to political, social and educational factors*" (Bates et al, 1998, p110). GNVQ students had a powerful but subtle effect on how these justifications manifested themselves in teaching and assessment practices. But so too did the awarding bodies anxious to secure the consistency of grades demanded by the QCA.

¹⁵ In July 2000, communication of the new assessment system for 'Vocational A-levels' was similarly erratic. In Riverside college, staff involved in the Capey pilot were not consulted about their experience

These different pressures shaped normative values about what ‘autonomy’ and ‘motivation’ in vocational education mean. In turn, this shaped values about who is a ‘good’ GNVQ teacher and who is a ‘good’ GNVQ student. In interviews, students’ selection of ‘the teacher I learn the most from’ included five in the fieldwork sample. Yet, the characteristics that teachers associated with ‘good’ students, and students with ‘good’ teachers, depended on what aspects of education and learning they valued. It is significant that 55% of the sample chosen by teachers as motivated and autonomous came from Intermediate GNVQ, suggesting that ‘good’ students are, in the main, those who are procedurally autonomous and able to work with the assessment system. Yet, for someone like Neil whose values did not fit those he saw in GNVQs, the tension was profound.

This observation is illuminated by research on social norms built around assessment. This suggests that “*the norms and networks of (largely implicit) expectations and agreements that are evolved between teachers and students*” create contracts that legitimate particular assessment practices (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, p56). For example, if teachers’ questioning has always been limited to ‘lower order’ skills, such as adherence to correct procedures, students may well see questions about ‘understanding’ or ‘application’ as unfair, illegitimate or even meaningless (ibid.).

More broadly, FE teachers’ understanding of formative assessment has not been developed and the micro-disciplinary practices discussed in this study had particular effects on assessment practices. When marking assignments in the study, for example, it was difficult to resist a view that students have ‘hit (or missed) the bullets’. In part, this illustrates the limits in an outcome-based model of articulating precisely what skills like ‘critically evaluate’ mean. In a situation where teachers want students to pass and yet are scrutinised for national standards, the logical response is to provide formative feedback that indicates gaps in coverage. It rapidly becomes futile to offer students ideas for other

and leaders of dissemination meetings did not even know that there had been a three-year pilot course in the college.

improvements, or to challenge ideas and encourage more depth in future. An auditing approach to feedback is safer and less trouble.

Teachers negotiated both the dynamics of different groups and an apparent mix within their GNVQ groups of *amotivated*, compliant, embedded students and a few black swans. As Chapter Seven showed, there were also strong fluctuations in motivation over the two years. At the same time, some teachers' values and strategies were disrupted by students' responses to assessment. These disruptions did not show overt rebellion but, instead, subtle accommodations to the bullets. Some of these demands seem to arise from the way that students use the assessment specifications and others from teachers' expectations about the 'type' of student intake they deal with in GNVQs.

CHAPTER NINE

FROM 'LEARNING CAREERS' TO 'ASSESSMENT CAREERS'

INTRODUCTION

The pedagogic landscape of FE colleges has been transformed by the need to engage the 69% of 16 year-olds who now stay on in full-time education in England. In GNVQs, political concerns about how to motivate students and help them become autonomous learners, focused on new approaches to assessment. These approaches continue a political and educational response to a broader crisis of motivation amongst young people that began in the 1970s (A. Hargreaves, 1989). There is now a widespread consensus that 'achievement' can be measured through attainment of qualifications, thereby motivating people for lifelong learning and preparing them for an increasingly differentiated employment market. Although many educators support this consensus, there is strong dissent from such a vision, explored in Chapter Two. Yet, pessimism about the future portrays education as the new panacea for society's ills and defines new 'risks' associated with non-participation in purposeful learning. Chapter Two argued that this could produce increasingly moralistic judgements about the fate of those who do not heed these warnings of risk.

Within this ideological context, research into young people's motivation, discussed in Chapter Three, shows that FE teachers now deal with many young people who are not intrinsically motivated for learning. Instead, reflecting broader cultural dispositions in the UK, increasing numbers of students are likely to be 'pragmatically compliant' at best and 'hanging on' or 'drifting' at worst. Chapters One and Two set this problem in a context where FE teachers are themselves experiencing repeated restructuring and pressures on conditions of service that place 55% of the FE workforce on casual contracts.

Structural conditions contextualise an evaluation in this study of the impact of formative assessment on GNVQ students' autonomy and motivation. It explored policy design and its implementation at five levels: ideological, political, institutional and individual (teachers and students) in 'a policy trajectory' (Ball, 1997). Analysis aimed to account for the ways in which an initiative evolves, changes and is interpreted over time. A policy trajectory may therefore help policy analysts, people inside policy and those on the receiving end of it to make sense of the "*seemingly tenuous connection between policy and practice*" (Malen and Knapp 1997, p419). In the case of this study, a policy trajectory questions how notions of autonomy and motivation are being constructed through new forms of regulation in assessment systems. In the light of arguments in Chapter Two, regulation cannot be isolated from risk consciousness and low expectations.

The study shows that meanings and manifestations of autonomy and motivation emerged through an interplay between structural conditions, the policy debates surrounding the evolution of the GNVQ assessment model, discussed in Chapter Six, and the everyday social processes of assessment within FE colleges, analysed in Chapters Seven and Eight. Exploring this interplay at a time when both policy and the FE sector are being restructured helps to counter the danger of blaming a policy initiative, or teachers, for problems with students' autonomy and motivation. Conversely, it is important to avoid a portrayal of a policy initiative as having no effect on teachers and students at all. Instead, Bates argues that evaluation of OBA should emphasise:

the ways in which social influences such as teacher careers and perspectives; the social characteristics of students and values; student-teacher interaction; and institutional factors may result in a modification of competence-based pedagogy (Bates, 1998b, p43)

A sociological approach within a tradition of policy scholarship challenges the unwitting adoption of mantras about educational goals that accumulate around notions like autonomy, motivation and formative assessment. It is important to address these issues through a range of perspectives since:

irrespective of its origins and forms, policy can operate to de-skill teachers and otherwise dilute the quality of educational experiences; promote or perpetrate patterns of practice that deny students equitable educational opportunities and constrain impetus by distracting or paralysing the organisation (Malen and Knapp 1997, p440)

In addition to examining policy development and implementation, the study aimed to address criticism that the GNVQ assessment model lacks an underlying theory of learning (Hyland, 1994), embodies a 'discredited tradition of outcome-based learning' (Yeomans, 1997) and encourages 'instrumental autonomy' (Bates 1988a, b; Bloomer, 1998).

Concerns outlined in Chapter One suggested four research questions to connect policy with practice:

- a. how does the socio-economic and ideological context of policy for lifelong learning in the UK influence the types of motivation and autonomy seen as desirable for students in general vocational education?
- b. what does a policy-based case study of GNVQ assessment show about policy design, development and implementation in the post-compulsory curriculum?
- c. what does a practice-based case study of GNVQ assessment policy show about the impact of OBA on students' attitudes and approaches to learning and on teachers' approaches to formative assessment?
- d. how can formative assessment in post-compulsory education be improved in order to enhance students' autonomy and motivation?

As with any small-scale case study, findings and conclusions need further verification through discussion with a much broader sample of policy-makers, teachers and students

and perhaps through replication of specific questions, or testing of conclusions. The findings are therefore indicative rather than definitive.

Section One evaluates implications of GNVQ assessment policy for future assessment policy in post-compulsory education.

Section Two evaluates the effects of the GNVQ assessment model on students' autonomy and motivation.

Section Three evaluates the implications of GNVQ assessment for teachers' skills in formative assessment.

Section Four makes recommendations for policy-makers, curriculum designers, inspectors, college managers and teachers.

Section Five evaluates scholarship in this study.

Section Six suggests theoretical implications for autonomy and motivation in 'lifelong learning'.

1. THE GNVQ 'ASSESSMENT REGIME'

Initial aims in GNVQs were to motivate more young people to achieve qualifications and to help them become autonomous learners. A combination of OBA, portfolios, and criterion-referenced grading to reward approaches to learning, challenged deep-seated political assumptions about reliability and validity, parity of esteem between vocational and academic assessment and links between formative and summative assessment.

The study argues that policy-making in GNVQs created an 'assessment regime'. This notion draws on Foucault's concept of a 'regime of truth', applied to OBA by Edwards

and Usher (1994). They argue that practices, discourses and ideology associated with OBA promise empowerment and work iteratively to control those who use and promote them. In particular, liberal humanism is inextricably bound up in OBA (ibid): this study shows that it was integral to original policy aims and resonated with particular traditions in FE. It also shows how an assessment regime depends on a subtle, self-regulating acceptance of its purposes, practices and effects by all involved.

Further evidence of a 'regime' arises from the politically charged, closely regulated assessment model in GNVQs which, as Chapters Seven and Eight showed, has created distinctive pedagogic and organisational practices. At the same time, processes for developing 'policy texts' set up new political mechanisms for specifying and regulating learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Together with NVQs, GNVQs created new mechanisms through which political control over assessment specifications, quality assurance and statutory regulation of awarding bodies was exerted.

Yet, the apparent hegemony of new regulatory forms in post-compulsory assessment systems belies the extent to which extreme degrees of intervention, dissension, organisational turf wars and political *ad hocery* dogged the GNVQ assessment model. Chapter Six showed that GNVQs emerged rapidly from the low status margins of vocational education policy, and a short-lived immunity from political interference, to become embroiled in an ideological and epistemological maelstrom over 'parity of esteem' and 'standards' of achievement. Despite enthusiasm amongst many of the constituencies involved in developing the assessment model, fraught debates about 'standards' resulted in changes. Specifications for new Vocational A-levels show that initial aims of a distinctive assessment model to motivate 'non-traditional' learners, in a vocational curriculum largely for FE colleges, were compromised by political concerns about credibility in schools and the wider implications of an OBA model for public perceptions of 'rigour' and 'standards'.

In order to evaluate the impact of GNVQ policy, and then to suggest wider implications of OBA systems on learners' autonomy and motivation, it is therefore essential for

analysts to go beyond criticisms of a 'flawed' assessment model dominated by 'NCVQ dogma'. The debates surrounding GNVQ assessment policy between 1991 and 1999, discussed in Chapter Six, show starkly how apparently simple technical differences in terminology conceal profound conceptual and ideological differences about desirable forms of assessment. Whatever one's view of the original model, or changes for Vocational A-levels, it is clear that intractable fault-lines over 'standards' progressively undermined GNVQs' radical challenge to mainstream policy. There is a view, for example, that change was important for public perceptions that GNVQs were being improved (Sharp, 1998) and for removing associations of GNVQs with 'less able' students (Spours, 1997). However, this overlooks the extent to which traditional notions of standards prevent the emergence of parity of esteem in assessment policy. In GNVQs, a meritocratic, criterion-referenced system where, potentially, all students could get a Distinction grade was eroded by political pressures for national consistency of grades. This study suggests a poor outlook for assessment regimes that adopt new approaches to reliability or student empowerment (Broadfoot, 1998).

The chaotic development portrayed in Chapter Six led to different perceptions of problems in the assessment regime and to different attributions of blame. Yet, even those in the study who held NCVQ responsible for problems believed that a unique opportunity for dramatic, visionary change in vocational education has passed and is unlikely to appear again. With GNVQ development no longer the responsibility of a team committed solely to it, all interviewees outside OFSTED, the education 'side' of the DfEE and SCAA, believed that no-one now champions vocational education with the political and professional conviction it needs to survive as something distinctive and worthwhile. Whatever one's view of its role and impact, the NCVQ may turn out to be the last high-profile champion of vocational education.

Although some external constituencies in this study supported the aims of GNVQs, supporters had great difficulty influencing policy developments. The use of ideological categories for exploring responses to education reform amongst policy-makers and teachers (Ball, 1990; Hickox and Moore, 1995) helps to account for divisions over

appropriate forms of assessment in the post-16 curriculum. An academic tradition, deriving from ‘cultural restorationist’ ideas about norm-referenced ‘standards’ within subject disciplines, was represented by civil servants in the ex-DES and DfE, ministers, ex-SCAA officials and OFSTED inspectors. These constituencies were more politically influential than ‘vocational modernisers’ and ‘liberal humanists’ represented by civil servants in the ex-ED, officials in NCVQ, FEU and the awarding bodies, and the FEFC inspectorate.

One interpretation of analysis in Chapter Six is that conflicts in ideology, politics and organisational interests and traditions have enabled the DfEE to gain extensive control of content, assessment models and quality assurance in the post-16 curriculum. This implies that researchers and other constituencies hoping to influence policy need extensive technical and conceptual knowledge about different assessment regimes and their impact on learning. They also need insights about the diverse organisations and epistemic communities seeking to influence policy processes. Somehow, too, they need some acculturation into unfamiliar policy processes and alien organisational cultures whilst maintaining a critical distance (see also Batterson and Ball, 1995). As Alison Wolf argues, opportunities for academics to work directly inside policy illuminate the peculiar pressures that policy-makers work under¹.

This study shows that other constituencies involved in policy-making also need political acculturation. Interviewees from external constituencies believed that better control by the DfE (and then the DfEE), would have prevented NCVQ from running away with a larger remit than it was given or was capable of delivering. Analysis suggests, instead, that external constituencies needed robust insights into assessment issues, their associated technology and policy processes. Without this, it is difficult for these constituencies to contribute their expertise effectively and prevent central control from becoming hegemonic. This is especially important if QCA moves beyond the destructive turf wars seen in GNVQs by adopting high levels of central control in the name of ‘consensus’.

¹ See Ecclestone (1998) for discussion of Alison Wolf’s views about her role in GNVQ assessment policy.

Nevertheless, despite the need to understand and influence policy-making, it remains difficult for researchers to delve into the messy obscurity of policy processes for the vocational curriculum. In contrast to numerous policy studies of the National Curriculum, analysis in this study highlights the relative invisibility of individuals and constituencies in GNVQ debates. This makes it important to understand more about the diverse constituencies who influence policy, the organisational and normative perspectives they bring to debates about assessment and learning, and about the communities of expertise they draw on for their authority and credibility (see Hulme, 1998).

Researching inside these processes also shows the need to guard against a tendency, discussed in Chapter Four, to pathologise policy-makers as 'powerful', instrumental and dominated by 'new Right' ideology. Despite arguments that GNVQ policy emanates from pervasive neo-liberal notions of market and consumer choice (for example, Bloomer, 1998; Hodgkinson, 1998d), attributions of 'new Right' ideology did not apply to the complex, and passionately presented, beliefs held by most of the policy-makers in this study. Nor did attributes of 'powerful' or 'elite' apply to all interviewees. Normative themes in the data confirm analyses by Hickox and Moore (1995), Moore and Hickox (1999) of the contradictory and unstable ideologies that continue to permeate the vocational curriculum. Researchers with critical perspectives therefore have to maintain a critical distance based on insights into education politics whilst being aware of the dangers of pathologising policy-makers or pandering naively to their power in accounts that fall into the trap of 'simple realism'.

In addition, although the DfEE now proclaims its commitment to 'evidence-based policy' (Blunkett 2000; Hammersley 2000), the study highlights a pragmatic, almost world-weary, acceptance of what might be characterised outside policy processes as confusion, even chaos. As Geoff Stanton argues, this would never be tolerated in reforming A-levels (1998). It is in relation to this dimension that most criticism might be levelled. Policy slipped unnoticed from Eggar's original remit to NCVQ into a large-scale initiative with virtually no initial funding or political oversight. It then ran into what

Gilbert Jessup argues is the UK's 'unique obsession' with particular notions of reliability and parity of esteem (interview, March 1998). The ensuing mess, and a long-running failure to learn from past mistakes in assessment policy (Stanton, 1998), imply profound problems in reconciling the conflicting normative worlds of all those involved. Far from open debate and the contribution of evidence from well-informed external constituencies to policy, actors in this study seemed to portray, and accept, that fraught policy design and regression to traditional notions of 'standards' are inevitable features of the assessment policy landscape in the UK.

In particular, the study highlights the extent to which meanings of 'standards' in education policy are perhaps more prone to both deliberate and unwitting misuse than ever. As Raymond Williams argues, certain words embody practices and institutions embedded within culture and society at any given time. Problems over meanings are therefore "*inextricably bound up*" with the problem the word is being used to discuss (1983, p15) in a particular historical and political context. This is strikingly evident in his analysis of the word 'standards' as "*an exceptional kind of plural...a plural singular*" (p296), where disagreeing with one meaning implies, in the case of 'standards', disagreeing with the idea of quality itself. My study shows that diverse normative values underpin 'standards' in assessment policy and it is not insignificant that 'morals' and 'values' are the other two examples Williams gives of plural singulars. The roots and uses of 'standards' illustrate so well its meanings and implications in assessment policy that I have reproduced William's analysis in Appendix 18.

Political, semantic and organisational conflict illustrated in this study also obscured underlying, contradictory theories of learning in GNVQs and compounded the problem that different perspectives on autonomy and motivation were not communicated or debated publicly. Nor were they discussed explicitly in policy texts, the NCVQ's and QCA's own research programmes or FEFC and OFSTED reports. And, apart from an attempt to articulate the fusion that Jessup envisaged between formative and summative assessment, summative purposes of collecting evidence dominated policy texts. Chris Boys, an NCVQ researcher involved with GNVQs, examined language in GNVQ

specifications and its interpretation by teachers and students. He argues that the GNVQ model derived from naïve views of learning, ignored social factors which mediate language and interpretation in assessment and paid little attention to the role of institutions and teachers (Boys, 2000).

At meso and micro levels in this study, teachers' and students' responses to the GNVQ assessment regime, and the contradictory political and organisational demands it placed on teachers, created an 'assessment community' with its own relationships and dynamics. Chapters Seven and Eight argued that an assessment community both responds to, and shapes, norms and expectations about learning, autonomy and motivation. The effects of an assessment regime are therefore organic, iterative and unpredictable. And, as Sections Two and Three show below, effects are both positive and negative.

Last, although it is commonplace to argue that bureaucratic assessment and inspection systems reflect mistrust of teachers, GNVQ developments seem to reflect a different version of low expectations amongst policy-makers. NCVQ officials were not optimistic about teachers' ability to be 'student-centred' or to foster autonomy, and OFSTED did not appear to expect vocational teachers to understand traditional interpretations of 'standards'. None of the constituencies represented in the study seemed to expect government to resource the staff training necessary to secure both the desired learning approaches and reliable, valid assessment. Instead, prescriptive guidance was added into the 1995 model and removed in the Capey model but replaced with stronger regulation by the QCA and awarding bodies. GNVQs therefore show that low expectations amongst policy-makers are not a simple mistrust of teachers. They are also a reflection of trying to rescue chaotic policy-making whilst securing curriculum change, but without resourcing it.

2. STUDENTS' 'ASSESSMENT CAREERS'

The typology of autonomy, motivation and formative assessment was developed and tested in this study and data confirm that the GNVQ assessment regime ensnares students

in procedural autonomy and prevents deeper forms of critical autonomy. This is caused both by GNVQ-related effects and non-related factors, discussed here.

The disparate design of each unit's specifications provided no explicit, or even implicit, coherence in the types of autonomy Advanced students could, potentially, develop over two years. In a unitised programme, students wended their way through parallel assignments, each demanding different types of autonomy. Yet the identical formats and vocabulary of the specifications obscured these differences. Despite potential for critical autonomy in the Distinction criteria for some units, criteria shifted erratically between procedural, personal and critical autonomy. This is likely to be problematic for students at *any* level of motivation or ability.

This study also confirms findings from Boys' study of an Advanced GNVQ Business course in an FE college that, whilst students were independent in 'finding out' information, they remained dependent in 'working out' solutions. Instead, they collected information for tasks set by teachers within units but did not set or test research questions (Boys, 2000). Similarly, teachers in my study taught units separately and divided work into tasks and students liked the benefits of knowing what was expected of them. This approach enabled more students to pass but reduced the depth needed for Distinction grades. At the same time, minimal and fragmented contact time led teachers to balance the pressures of student expectations and achieving 'national standards' with the risk of allowing students to fail (see also Boys, 2000). Particular tensions occurred because 'national standards' in the Capey model meant raising achievement at Pass level, adhering to very precise interpretations of criteria, whilst keeping Distinction grades to an 'acceptable' level. All teachers in this study tried to reconcile these tensions with their own beliefs and goals for vocational education.

These factors, and the GNVQ assessment requirements themselves, promoted convergent assessment geared to continuous accumulation of summative evidence rather than open-ended, interaction that would characterise genuine constructivist assessment (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). In response to this problem, a more precise typology of autonomy and

motivation can enhance qualitative evaluations of assessment regimes. The typology in Chapter Three suggests that the eighteen students in the study were motivated by a fluctuating mixture of *external*, *introjected*, *identified*, *intrinsic* and *interested* factors. Their overall approach was characterised in Chapter Seven as embedded compliance with some instrumental transformation of content. Students also showed a striking degree of stoicism and resilience to personal and course-related setbacks. They valued strong social commitments and relationships with teachers and peers: this social dimension enabled students to survive fluctuations in engagement and motivation. An ‘embedded’ dimension to their experience of GNVQs showed strong potential for deeper engagement and was crucial to students’ emerging confidence and their sense of identity.

Six of the eighteen students developed deeper forms of autonomy and motivation, and used social motivation both to enhance their autonomy and to get them through demotivation or drift. Nevertheless, in spite of this potential, their compliance could be seen as a pragmatic, rational response to managing the demands of the GNVQ requirements, expectations of external commitments, such as part-time employment, and fluctuations in motivation and engagement over two years.

For most students, there was little distinction between deeper forms of self-direction and accountability (Bates, 1998a). In part, limits to autonomy arose because notions of autonomy underpinning official communication of aims for GNVQ assessment, discussed in Chapter Three, are vague. Teachers and students, including the most able, equated autonomy with ‘not needing help’ and ‘doing things yourself’ and motivation with ‘achieving targets’. These equations obscured the way that confident students had actually worked out how to maximise different sources of help. Yet, less confident students who wanted to be accepted within an assessment community emulated more confident students who seemed to ‘do everything themselves’. Limited ideas about autonomy were reinforced by the apparent similarity of the assessment specifications which led students to view autonomy as comprising the same skills and activities in every unit.

At the same time, 'restructuring' in FE has reduced formal contact time with students. There are therefore increased opportunities for informal and non-formal learning. Although these seem to justify the idea of autonomy as 'doing it yourself', informal/non-formal learning can reinforce low risk strategies, instrumental attitudes towards formative assessment, and encourage students to maintain comfortable behaviours and dispositions. *Ad hoc*, informal and non-formal learning can therefore allow students to have an undue influence on expectations and norms within particular assessment communities or to continue unhelpful dispositions from past experiences of learning. This problem has implications for balancing demands for higher achievement and student expectations of attendance, opportunities for informal learning and commitment. One response is to call for much higher expectations of contact time and for ways to combat rising levels of part-time employment amongst students (Davies, 2000; Spours, 1997). There are obvious tensions here over how compulsory post-compulsory education can or should be.

One outcome of competing factors, observed in this study, is a 'comfort zone'. Deriving from largely tacit norms, this enabled teachers and students to establish what counted as 'acceptable engagement'. A comfort zone perhaps exists, to some extent, on any course. In GNVQs, it enabled students, particularly those reluctantly, or uncertainly, in education, to operate within safe, manageable boundaries and allowed teachers to manage the conflicting demands of GNVQs. The desire to create safe conditions in which students can develop, together with concerns about students' progression and an over-loaded assessment model, all seemed to make teachers and students comrades in adversity, 'getting through the system'.

A comfort zone can also pressurise teachers to reduce cognitive difficulty for students they see as hard to motivate. In this respect, GNVQs continue a tradition in vocational education of prioritising procedural and personal (affective) dimensions of learning, noted in Chapter One. GNVQs also reinforce this through a fragmented 'modular market' where individual teachers who encourage critical thinking amongst students have to sell their wares alone. In this study, two teachers struggled to maintain deeper notions of critical autonomy, and, in the case of Neil's goals for the 'Social Policy' unit, lost out

to student pressures for relevance and for learning that was not ‘too difficult’. While this example supports an argument that OBA regimes close down “*the space for generating alternative views and practices*” (Edwards and Usher, 1994, p11), the study shows that OBA contributes to this problem rather than creates it.

This study also indicates that students who succeed in GNVQ might not do so without the initial prop of OBA. The pressures of credentialism that elevate instrumental motivation are compounded by the bleak alternatives of poorly-paid service jobs, low status employment schemes or unemployment. Teachers in this study cared a great deal about maximising achievement in these difficult circumstances. The resulting ‘horizons for action’ produced embedded compliance as a pragmatically rational response (Hodkinson et al, 1996). In this context, young people who saw themselves as unsuccessful learners with a vital second chance in GNVQs used the specifications as a route into an assessment community. If used well, specifications could provide a springboard from extrinsic, target-led motivation to deeper forms of self-determined motivation suggested by the typology. Yet, as Michael’s experience of moving from GNVQs to university indicated in Chapter Seven, it is important to explore ways of removing the prop so that students can develop deeper forms of autonomy and prioritise intrinsic forms of motivation.

The study did not focus on less motivated students and did not, therefore, find *amotivation* (as characterised in the typology), active disengagement or resistance. However, Chapter Seven showed that even students well-disposed to GNVQs experienced barriers to critical autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Some barriers lie outside the GNVQ assessment regime. For example, students viewed assessment as ‘meeting the requirements’ and not about deepening their learning. These attitudes are widespread in National Curriculum assessment and other qualifications (for example, Weedon et al, 1999; Ecclestone and Hall, 1999). Nevertheless, the strictures imposed by GNVQs also have strong parallels in other micro-disciplinary practices, discussed in Chapter Two, such as inspection, funding and quality assurance. These play a powerful role in shaping the normative dimensions of college cultures by prioritising practices and

discourses associated with 'checking', 'tracking', 'auditing' and 'evidencing'. This prevented teachers and students understanding the connections between formative assessment and motivation and autonomy.

Students' and teachers' discourses and responses in this study emerged from, and created, cultural capital and a community of practice implementing the assessment regime. The notion of 'culture' as the "*socially constructed and historically derived common base of knowledge, values and norms for action that people grow into and come to take as a natural way of life*" (Hodkinson et al, 1996, p148) is therefore useful. Although Hodkinson et al apply the notion of 'culture' to factors shaping career decision-making, this study suggests that assessment communities and regimes form micro-cultures that shape responses to learning and assessment activities.

It can be argued that the subsequent interplay of discourse, practices and cultural capital foster 'assessment careers'. Engagement within an 'assessment community' occurs within largely tacit boundaries formed by expectations of students' ability, motivation and prospects for progression. Following Bloomer (1997, 1999) and Hodkinson et al (1996), the two years of a GNVQ course create particular individual and group-based 'turning points', 'transformations' and 'horizons for action'. Young people also form, and experience, their own transformations and horizons. The notion of an 'assessment career' may therefore account for the socialising effects of an assessment regime in shaping learners' identities within a learning programme. This idea builds upon research evidence about the formation of 'pupil careers' in primary schools where:

'pupil career' can be seen as a particular social product deriving from children's strategic action in school contexts [and] strongly influenced by cultural expectation (Pollard and Filer, 1999, p22).

Opportunities for critical autonomy are therefore affected by the impact of schooling, life experiences and social and individual commitments to learning. If students are socialised into particular responses to assessment requirements and come to expect certain forms of feedback, perhaps through Intermediate and Advanced GNVQ, followed by OBA in higher education, a GNVQ-style assessment career is becoming a reality for some

students. This study suggests that OBA, implemented within the particular socio-cultural context of a course, could shape a lifelong 'assessment career'.

This socialisation has implications for the ways in which students move between qualification pathways, especially when research already shows the instrumental impact of credentialism on post-16 students' choice of options for September 2000 (Spours and Hodgson, 2000). And, as Broadfoot and Pollard suggest (2000), if National Curriculum assessment encourages children to be intolerant of risk and ambiguity, lifelong learning could become little more than an unrisky compliance with the latest assessment requirements. Analysis in this study suggests that GNVQ assessment continues to shape young people's perceptions of their own and their peers' identity, and, as a consequence, views about their involvement in formative assessment activities (see Reay and Wiliam, 1999; Torrance and Pryor, 1998). Further research could relate the typology to a theory of 'assessment career', deriving from an exploration of Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' and identity in different subject and qualification tracks and at different levels (Ecclestone et al, 2000).²

Despite evidence here that students' attitudes to autonomy and motivation are being affected by assessment in GNVQs, the context of risk consciousness and low expectations discussed in Chapter Two has not led, in this study, to moral judgements amongst teachers about students' lack of commitment, or their 'deficits'. A useful further dimension would be to apply structural analysis more closely to studies of motivation within local 'lived' education and job markets (Ball et al, 1999) by incorporating explicit dimensions of 'risk' and 'expectations'. This could explore the effects of lifestyle in different regions and localities on young people's attitudes to learning programmes. However, in a context of growing State incursion into moral and personal life in the name of 'risk aversion', noted in Chapter Two, this would raise new dilemmas for researchers about their own incursion into the increasingly blurred space between public and private spheres (see Allatt and Bates, 1999b).

² I also hope to interview three of the black swans progressing to university next year and Michael as he goes into the second year of his degree.

3. TEACHERS' SKILLS IN FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Discussion so far illustrates numerous theoretical and practical barriers to formative assessment becoming an integral strategy in teachers' and students' repertoires for developing motivation and autonomy. In addition, barriers to critical autonomy and to intrinsic, interested and social forms of motivation discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight are, as I argued above, affected profoundly by OBA. However, some barriers to effective formative assessment lie beyond the impact of GNVQ assessment.

There is, for example, likely to be variation in the extent to which teachers themselves have experienced constructivist models of learning. There is also a general lack of professional awareness about the different purposes of assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998a) which is not addressed explicitly by FE teacher education programmes (see UCET, 2000). Meanwhile, continuing professional development in FE colleges remains seriously under-resourced (FEFC, 2000d) and under-theorised.

Understanding how to use formative assessment effectively is made more difficult by simplistic and implicit theories of learning bound up in rhetoric surrounding assessment policy. Teachers in this study equated assessment with summative recording of evidence while diagnostic and reflective questioning and approaches to feedback were *ad hoc* and not seen as 'assessment'. Pressures on time, the need to help students meet the criteria, whilst being wary of over-lenience on Distinction grades, dominated formative feedback. Nevertheless, instead of generalised discussion about formative assessment, teachers in the study did respond to requests from me to reflect on specific learning or assessment 'episodes'. This shows the potential of problem-based action research to encourage reflection and changes to formative assessment (see Pryor and Torrance, 1999; Swann and Ecclestone, 1999; Swann and Arthurs, 1999).

In addition to lack of awareness about formative assessment, the study highlights pressures that militate against deeper forms of autonomy and motivation. These pressures induced profound tensions for teachers: getting as many students as possible through the

course and the external tests; encouraging independent learning; encouraging individuals' personal development; trying to foster intrinsic motivation for subjects; responding to college targets for higher levels of achievement measured by grades; maintaining the integrity of standards within GNVQs by applying the grading themes in the 1995 model and the criteria of the Capey model. These conditions, combined with resource pressures on contact time and low morale amongst some sections of the two colleges, were significant constraints on teachers' motivation to think about, let alone change, their assessment practices³.

New forms of quality assurance to regulate grading decisions exerted an especially powerful influence in this study on teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to 'appropriate' approaches to assessment. Teachers in the Capey model adjusted to a remote style of official checking in place of previously more supportive forms of moderation. This change reflects pressures arising from an intensification of national and local requirements for summative recording, accountability and certification (see Coffield, 1999e; Ainley, 1999). In addition, as Chapter Six showed, it is important not to underestimate how attempts by QCA to standardise assessment decisions became a political imperative (Goff, 1996). All but one teacher in this study internalised this imperative. In part, this raises issues about government control and lack of trust of teachers in an assessment system devolved largely to teachers (see also Wilmot, 1999). It also suggests that burgeoning guidance and regulation are intended to compensate for lack of resources for staff development and the necessary intensive, regular discussion of requirements that, as Wolf argues, secure 'standards' (1995).

These contradictory official requirements, and responses to them, all define 'achievement' and, therefore, 'autonomy' and 'motivation' in particular ways. Over the two years of fieldwork, college managers exerted more pressure on teachers to raise achievement measured by higher grades. One course in particular showed that grades

³ At the end of fieldwork in July 2000, Riverside college was beginning the second round of restructuring in three years, with cuts in professional development time, a redundancy programme and increased teaching contact time. Such moves were presented as necessary to give the college a financial surplus in five years.

could be raised by formal expectations monitored by personal 'learning managers', short-term targets, intensive coaching and good relations with teachers. Nevertheless, there was no overview amongst the staff teams of what types of motivation and autonomy GNVQs should develop and, therefore, what achievement might mean. In the absence of broader discussions about the purpose of post-16 general education (Bloomer, 1997; Spours, 1997), or what 'achievement' should encompass, goals for critical autonomy and intrinsic forms of motivation in vocational programmes are difficult to realise.

The study also supports an argument in Chapter Three that critical thinking, if and when it occurs, is rooted firmly within vocational contexts and subjects and cannot be 'bolted on' and still be meaningful to teachers and learners. As Chapter Eight showed, specific examples of subject content revealed notions of critical autonomy but teachers' understanding and commitment to it were both variable and individualistic, even within their own subject and vocational skills.

Focused evaluation of what type of autonomy students could or should develop is also displaced, in part at least, because students and teachers in this study valued ipsative progress. They were preoccupied with maximising this whilst meeting the requirements, rather than with developing subject-based critical autonomy. All eighteen students and seven of the nine teachers believed strongly that students developed personal and intellectual self-direction. Nonetheless, it is clear from this study that these perceptions were shaped by credentialism, students' future goals and immediate personal and social preoccupations. Room for manoeuvre was also seriously constrained by resource pressures and the prescriptive demands of the GNVQ specifications. These factors raise questions about the role of young people themselves in deciding what is 'critical' and 'relevant' and how far external constituencies should impose their own views about empowerment or autonomy (Fielding, 1998; White, 1998).

The need to gain professional commitment to critical autonomy, and then to develop skills in fostering it, is complicated further by heated political disputes, discussed in Chapter Six, over the content and scope of outcomes in GNVQs and over which

constituencies have a legitimate voice in deciding them. This suggests that teachers of a broader, critical curriculum would need, somehow, to be involved in designing it.

Whatever the logistics of achieving this, the study shows the need to go beyond calls for critical autonomy and to consider how to influence the constituencies and politically fraught processes that determine the post-16 vocational curriculum. Without such consideration, calls for a critical curriculum will remain 'academic' in the most pejorative sense of the word. The end of visionary aspirations for the vocational curriculum, signalled perhaps by the new hegemony of the QCA, makes debate about future directions and hopes for a critical curriculum more difficult than ever.

At the same time, promoting better formative assessment by offering research evidence is difficult. Researchers face dilemmas if their accounts challenge students' and teachers' interpretations of factors affecting autonomy and motivation. In particular, low morale and pressures on FE teachers lead some researchers to emphasise policy and its effects as the cause of problems (see Ainley and Bailey, 1998; Bloomer, 1998). Suggesting improvements to practice might therefore be dismissed as merely another symptom of long-running political and media derision of teachers. Indeed, in a climate where policy-makers already criticise college teachers for not achieving goals for lifelong learning (Coffield, 1999e), researchers' suggestions for improving practice are likely to be dismissed by teachers as a 'theory too far'.

Nevertheless, and despite the enormity of the task, this study confirms the need to be more precise, and then more strategic, about what types of autonomy can and should be developed in different curricula at different levels. The typology might provide a basis for evaluating how far any assessment system can develop different types of autonomy and motivation and whether behaviourist and constructivist models of assessment can be reconciled in a strategic development of autonomy.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy-makers, QCA researchers and qualification designers, awarding bodies and FEDA

- the effects of the ‘standards fault-line’ and chaotic policy-making in GNVQs, presented in this study should be disseminated and discussed amongst policy-makers and external constituencies involved in assessment policy
- the effects of defining and promoting ‘achievement’ measured as meeting targets on deeper forms of autonomy and motivation should be evaluated
- theories of learning and their implications for formative assessment should be included in official guidance provided to teachers, inspectors, students and other bodies involved in developing and evaluating assessment regimes
- theoretical and empirical exploration of the connections between autonomy, motivation and formative assessment could be incorporated in initial teacher education and professional development programmes
- materials which explore different types of autonomy and motivation and the role of formative assessment should be developed for teachers and students
- more robust research evidence about how different assessment regimes encourage or discourage particular forms of autonomy and motivation should be generated, and read, by the diverse range of constituencies involved in policy initiatives (for example, the current DfEE initiative for ‘transforming teaching and learning’)

OFSTED and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI)

- there should be an extension to inspectors' current evaluations of 'learning' and 'achievement' in order for them to evaluate and publicise the types of autonomy and motivation that students appear to develop and, in particular, whether students achieve more grades at the expense of deeper forms of autonomy and motivation
- inspectors should evaluate and publicise the quality and availability of opportunities for teachers to develop skills and understanding in using formative assessment more effectively
- inspectors should explore and report upon teachers' and students' espoused theories and theories-in-use relating to assessment and learning

COLLEGE MANAGERS

- colleges should develop an institutional assessment policy, with specific emphasis on developing students' autonomy and motivation through more effective formative assessment
- senior and curriculum managers should consider how to help teachers develop their assessment skills and how to find more resources for teachers development
- senior managers should evaluate whether putting too much emphasis on raising levels of achievement, measured solely by higher grades, discourages students' intrinsic motivation and critical autonomy
- colleges and the new LSC need to consider the effects of reduced contact time and *ad hoc* informal learning on students' motivation and autonomy

TEACHERS

- course teams should discuss how students might progress from procedural autonomy to personal and critical autonomy and the attributes that individual teachers believe to be necessary for personal and critical autonomy
- course teams should consider how different types of autonomy could be integrated across modular courses and how to maximise opportunities for building group cohesion as a basis for developing social motivation and commitment
- teachers should discuss with students their expectations of autonomy and different types of motivation at set points during a course, exploit the potential amongst students for intrinsic, interested and social forms of motivation and try to move students away from over- emphasis on introjected and identified goals that arise from ‘getting through the course’ and setting instrumental targets
- teachers should discourage students from equating ‘autonomy’ with solitary work and not asking for help
- course teams should consider what forms of professional development they need in order to improve formative assessment and their understanding of motivation and autonomy

5. EVALUATING SCHOLARSHIP

I have tried throughout this thesis to tread fine lines suggested by an intuitive notion at the start that the evolution of research problems, theories, methodology and analysis, was iterative and partly tacit, partly linear and discursive. Similarly, the process of articulating a research epistemology and ideology and relating them to particular approaches, is a

complex mixture of being iterative and reflexive, serendipitous and logical, subjective and objective, modernist and post-modernist!⁴.

Nonetheless, C. Wright Mills' advice alerted me early on to differentiate between genuine creative evolution and licensed incoherence, and between eclectic use of materials, concepts and methods and "*being dilettantish*" (1970, p107). Hodgkinson's candid account of how he and colleagues arrived at a theory of 'careership' has confirmed the extent to which a "*mixture of planning, opportunism and muddle*" (1998c, p566) characterise responses to the possibilities and constraints of a research project. Citing Fine and Deegan, he argues that "*good researchers have prepared the ground so that they can make sense of serendipitous insight when it comes. I would add 'preparation' itself can be intuitive and unintentional as well as planned*" (ibid., p 567). He also shows that theoretical insights occur after data collection and analysis are well under way and, as Frank Coffield points out, when they have long been completed (informal communication).

The study confirms the powerful role played by the hermeneutics of serendipity, intuition and reasoned thought, noted above. Conclusions, questions and dilemmas have evolved iteratively through: designing the practical aspects of the study; routine filing; designing analytical memos; writing up findings; discussing emerging ideas with participants and colleagues; designing research studies as 'off-shoots' from the main study, reading and re-reading relevant research, drafting and editing the chapters. These processes all seem essential to a goal of 'intellectual craftsmanship' (Wright Mills, 1970). The study also shows that critical autonomy as a researcher builds upon procedural autonomy in acquiring basic technical and organisational skills and then moving onto confidence with specialist language and ideas. At the same time, motivation moves along the spectrum presented in the typology, especially between *identified*, *intrinsic* and *interested* forms.

⁴ Wending one's way between these characteristics reminds me of a Goon show sketch parodying art critics' comments about the 'brilliant concrete plasticity' of someone's work.....

Importantly, personal and critical autonomy are supported through constructivist formative assessment such as self-assessment and peer feedback on emerging chapters and papers and detailed comments by a colleague on the whole Ph.D. The study also offers insights into the social nature of learning where a goal for developing an intellectual 'craft' comes from a social and ethical commitment to a particular community of practice. In my case, commitments to different communities have emerged: the goal of being admitted 'formally' into an academic community; the wish to improve teachers' ability to deal with complex policy injunctions; a desire to explain policy chaos to those involved in creating it in very pressurised circumstances. In addition, the thesis has been a forceful reminder of why I care about young people like those on the GNVQ: meeting an ex-student, Ruth, towards the end of an intensive period of analysing data was a strong and affecting confirmation of this. In responding to these diverse communities, I have gained a much deeper understanding of their very different normative worlds and of theoretical and empirical tools for gaining some purchase on these worlds.

The process of becoming a professional researcher seems, then, to derive from: designing robust systems to organise ideas and data; articulating epistemology and ideology; being intuitively creative; being prepared to accommodate serendipity; being conscious of the affective, often difficult nature of learning. Reflecting on both the process and 'products' of the thesis has highlighted problematic dimensions of apprenticeship models of learning and feedback where, even at an advancing age, these processes, particularly that of receiving feedback, can recall long-forgotten experiences of schooling and uncertain learner identities! It has also confirmed that these affective dimensions, alongside resource pressures (such as carrying out research on a part-time basis), can reinforce safe dispositions towards learning, making comfort zones for researchers, as well as students, necessary but sometimes restricting havens from such pressures. A strong commitment to reflexivity and to maintaining *interested* motivation can, however, counter these tendencies.

More specifically, in spite of aims for policy scholarship, weaving together themes from macro, meso and micro levels has proved difficult since lines between 'policy science' and 'policy scholarship' are blurred:

We should be wary of dismissing too swiftly work that examines the empirical detail of policy formulation and implementation. The problem is surely that of making connections between theory and history and, in that respect, none of us [researchers] has a very convincing record (Whitty and Edwards, 1994, p29)

Further research would develop my understanding of the dilemmas of connecting macro, meso and micro levels of theory and empirical analysis, discussed in Chapter Four.

In striving for these connections, engagement with critics of research has been essential to clarify my own position, or at least to recognise its contradictions. In response to James Tooley's accusations of political bias, for example, I cannot imagine what non-political research might look like. So measurable objectivity is clearly unattainable but striving for a rational and valid representation of findings is not. Attempts to justify an epistemology and to relate it to ideological standpoints have illuminated my own partisanship. However, articulating this authentically is difficult since, as Chapter Two argued, apparent certainties about educational standpoints deriving from old associations with 'left', 'right' and 'liberal' have disappeared in New Labour's modernising 'settlement'.

Notwithstanding grand aims of helping participants 'make sense' of policy, it seems that a gulf continues to widen between researchers and potentially interested audiences. This felt acute to me at times during this study. Engaging policy-makers, even those interested in my study is, as Hammersley argues, an uphill struggle, particularly for qualitative studies (1994). Nevertheless, the need to put some of the policy debates on official record was acknowledged by many interviewees (see, for example, Ecclestone and Hall, 2000).

In colleges, I was conscious of merely adding another, albeit more benign, level of evaluation to teachers and students. Nonetheless, I offered advice when asked directly and initiated positive feedback about participants' strengths, as I saw them, when the fieldwork had finished. I was taken aback by the extent to which teachers and students said they enjoyed being listened to and taken seriously and by their interest in the detail of the findings. It seems a salutary sign of the lack of professional development time in FE, noted in Chapter One, that there is still so little time to discuss learning and assessment, and how much teachers welcomed the chance to do so. And, once a study is completed, teachers and researchers move onto new commitments with little time to consolidate what has been learned. This raises issues about how university researchers sustain a dialogue and productive research role in local institutions. Policy-makers also move on: only one of the 25 interviewees still plays a key role in GNVQ development and evaluation.

The effects of a climate of regulation were also salutary. Some participants faced a view from colleagues that talking to me was 'malingering' and 'skiving' and from some managers that a seminar to discuss findings was not 'relevant' staff development. Teachers were extensively preoccupied with the latest management action, imminent inspections and visits from the awarding body moderator. As Chapter Eight showed, a striking theme in the fieldwork data was a stream of indignation at the 'irrationality' of current life in colleges. Relentless change, responding to injunctions and lack of optimism were the most marked differences from my own experience in FE. Despite my own growing knowledge about assessment and how it could be improved to enhance motivation and autonomy, I had genuine empathy for teachers and students under these conditions.

Notwithstanding the constraints of this climate, there were benefits to methods used in the fieldwork. Post-observation interviews, participant observation and focused interviews over the two years of a GNVQ course built up holistic insights about pressures on teachers and students in colleges, and also about their diverse responses to these. Focusing on examples of teaching and assessment and on students' activities also helped,

in part, to move beyond 'espoused theories' and into the normative worlds of teachers and students. The time span and good relationships with participants also meant that I gained an overview of fluctuations, turning points and periods of drift and engagement amongst students and teachers.

Nonetheless, although I was as systematic as possible in constructing the teacher and student samples and collecting data, a better approach would be an ethnographic immersion for whole blocks of time at set periods over two years. This could compare the same units and assignments and track the accumulation of students' portfolios. My first year of the study was full-time and this showed the value of spending intensive periods of time in the colleges. In addition to marking assignments, and given my past experience of teaching BTEC National courses, I could also have taught some lessons. However, the size of the sample, the range of methods, and the inclusion of policy analysis, made an authentic ethnographic study unrealistic. The pressures that teachers, students and I were under during the second year of fieldwork also reduced the scale of my plans for taking accounts back and for coding transcripts collectively.

In addition, and with hindsight, I did not have the confidence to impose myself on teachers' time or into students' college lives in the way that ethnography demands. Despite my FE experience, I felt too 'different'. Nor am I convinced that the critical aims, outlined in Chapters One and Four, would have enabled me to ground actors' perspectives in the data: although I wished to reveal the authentic voices of students and teachers, ultimately, I have imposed my own interpretations and interests on the data. At the same time, whilst I saw myself as open and at ease in an FE context, it was six years since I had talked at length with 16-19 year olds. I underestimated the extent to which subtle barriers to immersion were created by my social class (particularly my accent) and perceptions by some teachers and students of a different institutional status in a 'posh' university. Yet this difference also worked to give my research credibility, as did the policy analysis dimension.

I gained a much deeper appreciation of the different values, purposes and approaches underlying 'ethnography', a term used loosely in research literature (see Johnson and Yeomans, 1995, for a critique). I also developed skills in interviewing diverse constituencies, including 'the powerful' and the much-less powerful. I became aware of the subtleties of interviewing, particularly the impact of status on either 'side' and of the ease with which interviewers can lead questions or, conversely, be distracted from the focus. In addition, I aimed consciously to avoid simple realism in my portrayals of accounts. Using a range of methods, including questionnaires, and multiple perspectives discussed in Chapter Four, enriched analysis of data from interviews and participant observations. Symbolic and normative perspectives combated a tendency towards a tidy, rational story. However, weaving the different perspectives with epistemological dilemmas and practical considerations has proved difficult. It seems that, ultimately, 'simple realist' presentation is difficult to avoid, a problem acknowledged by other researchers (for example, Ball, 1994a). Nonetheless, overt acknowledgement of the issue alerts readers to the danger and close examination of data for different perspectives could be addressed in separate methodological papers.

More practically, it is clear that maintaining good links with students requires informal and persistent contact, a finding confirmed by Coffield et al (1986) and Ball et al (1999). Even though these two studies focused on young people in and out of formal education or other official systems, the need for more sustained, even intensive, contact is obvious. In future studies, I will increase the frequency of informal progress letters, send short readable summaries in the form of flyers for comment (rather than waiting to produce a report at the end) and include birthday cards (Coffield et al, 1986). The logistics of gaining and maintaining access, discussed in Chapter Five, have added a crucial dimension to my research skills.

I also underestimated how difficult it was to explain my aims and rationale in a way that won policy-makers, teachers' and students' overt commitment to them, raising the question of how far participants give truly informed consent to research (Burgess, 1989; Riddell, 1989). General acceptance also varied. In some teams, I could make myself at

home in teachers rooms, having lunch and coffee breaks and talking informally with teachers outside the sample. In others, I was always welcome but more as a visitor and the busyness of shared staff rooms and fragmented break times eroded collegial and informal talk amongst teachers and myself, but also amongst them and their colleagues. In the policy fieldwork, there were wide variations in formality and flexibility.

The study also shows the important effects of the timing of research: it is clear from the policy analysis, for example, that access took place at a pivotal moment of organisational and political transition. This affected perceptions amongst different constituencies, both of the study itself and accounts of events. Similarly in colleges, it is essential to recognise the effects of fluctuations in teachers' and students' motivation and morale on accounts and responses to questions (see also Ball, 1993). Some of these were caused by 'natural' flows of the college year or week, but others were caused by key events such as visits by the awarding body moderator, inspector or standards' moderation meetings. Timing is also crucial to disseminating findings to the constituencies addressed in the last section: presenting issues as if they only apply to GNVQ assessment policy, for example, will fall on deaf ears as Curriculum 2000 rapidly takes hold. There is therefore a need to draw out broader implications whilst keeping within the boundaries of empirical evidence from the study.

Last, I have gained a much deeper understanding about the implications of ethnography and qualitative approaches and the value of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. In particular, official statistics (for example, students' retention and achievement rates and staffing in colleges, presented in Chapter One and Two) and questionnaires are valuable ways of triangulating findings and interpretations, despite the 'shadow cast' effect of questionnaires discussed in Chapter Five. The study showed the value of deriving questionnaires from examples and issues in fieldwork data and then applying them to a broader sample but also showed that, despite careful preparation and piloting, it is difficult to frame robust questions. This reduced the usefulness of questions to teachers about their marking practices. Nevertheless, I gained useful practical insights

and SPSS software highlighted the usefulness of computer analysis, particularly the facility for cross-tabulating responses from different sections of the sample.

The experience and reflection here are, potentially, a foundation for considering how to extend my understanding of epistemology and ethics as well as skills in methodology. I shall strive for this, in spite of pressures that appear to beset many colleagues as pressures for funded research and RAE outputs intensify.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR ENHANCING MOTIVATION AND AUTONOMY IN LIFELONG LEARNING

The implications discussed here arise from relating observations from the empirical data to an analysis of ideological trends earlier in the study. They are therefore tentative and need to be tested further.

A study of the GNVQ assessment regime has taken place when new political targets are being set for higher rates of achievement in qualifications. Targets appear to signify high expectations but may conceal increasingly low expectations about the *purposes* of learning or expected engagement with it. Instead of transformation and critical intelligence, qualifications based on OBA could encourage extrinsic motivation and self-interest. This can make teachers, learners and government agencies evaluating provision lower their horizons to 'getting students through' with minimum engagement. Such trends undermine goals for intrinsic and interested forms of motivation and over-emphasise procedural autonomy removed from the influence of teachers. The cumulative effect is to produce a 'minimalist pedagogy' accompanied by low expectations amongst curriculum designers, teachers and inspectors of learners' potential for intrinsic motivation or critical autonomy.

One implication of low expectations might be that OBA regimes offer procedural autonomy to compensate for the extension of childhood dependency into early adulthood, perhaps signified by an absence of expectations of good jobs or even living away from

home. At the same time, it can be argued that growing regulation and audit-based systems in quality assurance and assessment systems reflect a subtle loss of faith in voluntarism, intrinsic motivation and social or professional commitments. The micro-disciplinary practices associated with regulating teachers' assessment decisions could increasingly control how teachers design and assess learning activities. In this context, OBA offers a regulated, low-trust, low risk version of autonomy. This is not overt, or deliberate since teachers, curriculum designers and inspectors may themselves be affected by fears of other risks: too many students failing or leaving with no qualifications; not meeting targets and managing groups with very diverse levels of motivation and expectations of engagement.

The study has shown tension between concerns about the effects of risk consciousness, discussed in Chapter Two, and the very real risks of unemployment and low skills for many people. It might be argued that risk consciousness, combined with technical rationality, shapes social and individual norms in new ways until, as Habermas observed, these become 'rational'. In education policy and practice, new definitions of 'risk' create new responses that are increasingly codified and then regulated. In assessment and quality assurance systems, new layers of expertise then emerge to ensure that teachers and students use them properly. Not only do these produce increasingly formalised learning and assessment but a circular logic of prescription, clarification and regulation may slowly confine spaces for innovation and creative risk.

The reality of large numbers of students whose motivation in formal learning is instrumental and tenuous therefore makes getting them through with minimum engagement a rational response. This is reinforced by the way that performativity in assessment systems replaces meaningful targets with 'simulacra'; the rituals and symbols of meeting targets whether or not these have any intrinsic meaning (Torrance, 2000). Once hitting the target becomes the main goal, deep forms of autonomy become risky and then, insidiously, merely irrelevant or obtainable only by an elite. One effect is to marginalise critical, difficult or esoteric aspects of learning as 'academic', 'elitist', 'irrelevant', 'unrealistic' and 'unmeasurable'. The demise of critical autonomy in the Social Policy unit of this study symbolised how this marginalisation can happen in a

modular course where consumer demand amongst students puts pressure on what counts as acceptable learning. An overly safe climate also redefines as no longer viable the 'nice' forms of relevance in negotiated, open-ended assignments that Barbara and her colleagues in this study wished to reinstate. Yet, avoiding risks associated with creative, empowering and motivating forms of assessment means that early expectations of motivation and engagement amongst a significant proportion of students, are reduced to stoicism, 'bearing up' and enduring repetitiveness.

One implication of arguments here is the need for a new dissenting perspective to those that currently characterise responses to policy for lifelong assessment. This is especially important if the incursive morality discussed in Chapter Two makes more educators believe that people's lack of motivation affects the fate of others or that certain forms of learning are 'irresponsible'. Once risk comes to be seen as any transgressional behaviour, those who do not participate or achieve could come to be seen as deviant 'Others' (see, for example, Colley, 2000; Bullen, et al, 2000).

In addition to the need for debate about this contention, this study argues for less prescriptive assessment regimes and more effective professional development in using formative assessment as part of a strategic approach to developing autonomy. It also argues for new debates about content and aims for vocational education. Without clear aspirations, assessment could increasingly encourage the idea that motivation is an inherently desirable trait or quality, and an end in itself. As Hargreaves argues, this obscures the question of what we are motivating people to do or be (1989). The same problem applies to autonomy.

The slow spread of OBA into higher and adult education⁵ could, therefore, extend the instrumental motivation, and the procedural and limited form of personal autonomy highlighted in this study. There are therefore important research and policy-based questions about how to achieve a balance between student access to public specifications

⁵ See National Commission, 1997; Hayes et al, 2000.

of what count as acceptable standards of achievement and necessary regulation, and open, flexible and empowering curricula.

A concluding comment from Michael, one of the black swans in this study, illustrates the need to cut an academic, political and pedagogic path through the minefield of outcomes, criteria and regulation in order to prepare students for a life of risk, both creative and threatening risk, and uncertainty. In his first term at university, he realises that he must wean himself off the security of the GNVQ criteria and recognises both the risk and opportunity offered by much looser boundaries:

M: ... [not having criteria] improves your autonomy. You have to decide what you want to put in and what you want to aim for, rather than doing this criteria and that

KE: Even if they offered [detailed criteria] to you, would you feel reassured by that so when you came here on day one, there it all was?

M: yes, but that would be the easy way out...when you go out into the big bad world, there is no criteria is there? There is no set way to work so I think it's a way of encouraging you.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Glossary ofonyms and abbreviations (Chapter 1)

APPENDIX 2

Chronology of vocational initiatives in the vocational curriculum 1979-2000
(Chapter 1)

APPENDIX 3

Figures showing completion and recruitment in GNVQs

APPENDIX 4

Research questions as a basis for fieldwork

APPENDIX 5

Changes to Advanced GNVQ assessment specifications, Business and HSC.
1992-2000

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Categories for coding policy fieldwork data

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APPENDIX 17

An outline of developments in Advanced GNVQ assessment policy 1990-2000

APPENDIX 18

Raymond William's analysis of the word 'standards' (Williams, 1983)

APPENDIX 1 GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A-levels :	General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level)
BTEC :	The Business and Technology Education Council
CGLI:	City and Guilds of London Institute
CPVE :	Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education
DES :	Department of Education and Science
DES:	Department for Education and Science
DfE :	Department for Education
DfEE :	Department for Education and Employment
ED :	Employment Department
EdExcel :	awarding body created by merger of BTEC and University of London Examination Board
FE :	Further Education
GCSE :	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GNVQ :	General National Vocational Qualifications
HE :	Higher Education
LEAs :	Local Education Authorities
LSC:	Learning and Skills Council
MSC :	Manpower Services Commission
NCVQ :	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
OBA :	Outcome-based assessment
QCA :	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SCAA :	Schools' Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SLSS :	Social and Lifeskills
TVEI :	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
YMCA :	Young Men's Christian Association
YOP :	Youth Opportunities Programme

APPENDIX 2 VOCATIONAL INITIATIVES 1979-2000

DATE	INITIATIVE/SUPPORT	KEY FEATURES	PROBLEMS	IMPLICATIONS/ PRECEDENTS
1978	Unified Vocational Preparation Scheme for young workers : MSC and the ED Youth Opportunities Programme : MSc and ED	General vocational preparation, life and social skills and some job-related training As above	No accreditation; marginalised in FE colleges As above; diverse and patchy provision; poor quality control	New genre of education, incorporating youth work traditions, personal and social education and bringing in a new 'style' of teacher and student into FE colleges
1980	DES Consultation Paper 'Examinations 16-18'	Proposals to rationalise courses for non A-level students	Friction between vocational awarding bodies and school bodies (e.g. Schools' Council)	Turf wars to come later in CPVE and GNVQs
1982	DES Consultation Paper '17+ : A New Qualification'	Proposals for new pre-vocational courses with nationally-recognised certification		
1982	FEU report 'A Basis for Choice'	An influential report promoting new forms of assessment (e.g. portfolios) in a pre-vocational programmes in FE colleges		Regarded as an important report from FEU, raising its profile in colleges
1982	DES merges the Business and Technician Councils to form the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC)	A quango accrediting vocational programmes in colleges	Not an independent awarding body like City and Guilds of London Institute	Confusion over boundaries and roles in relation to awarding bodies in CPVE and later in GNVQs
1984	MSc and the ED introduce the Technical Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) in post-14 curricula in schools and colleges	ED/MSc sponsored and funded; LEA-organised; separate vocational and technical options in schools and colleges; integrated options; opportunities for collaboration and curriculum development; personal and social education	No formal accreditation often marginalised in schools and colleges	New forms of intervention in schools and FE colleges; 'vocationalising' of post-14 curriculum for particular learners: government saw it as for 'low achieving' students not as a mechanism for 'parity of esteem' with O-levels and A-levels (Young, 1991)
1984	DES announces the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) in post-16 curriculum in schools and colleges	A new nationally-recognised qualification to replace BTEC General Certificate and the City and Guilds '365' general vocational preparation qualification; new forms of assessment (portfolios, unit-based, competence-based specifications), jointly-awarded by BTEC and CGLI	Marginalisation in many schools and colleges; extreme turf wars between awarding bodies; lack of national recognition of certificate	Introduction of OBA; turf wars to come later; public, political and professional association of 'pre-vocational' with 'low ability' students, despite attempts to characterise them as 'low achieving' rather than 'less able'
1986	BTEC introduces the First Diploma in most subjects covered by CPVE, as precursor for their National Diplomas	Similar assessment features to CPVE; offered in colleges	Direct 'rival' to the CPVE which begins to become seen as a 'special needs' provision	First indications of bureaucracy in an OBA system
1986	Review of vocational qualifications by ED and ED and MSc set up National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ)	Recommendations for a rationalised national system of vocational qualifications Remit to NCVQ of rationalising a confusing system of vocational	Growing interest in the MSC for competence-based assessment system for vocational qualifications Remit to NCVQ of rationalising a	Continuing proliferation of qualification systems and rivalry between awarding bodies and BTEC Separation of NCVQ from education 'establishment'; OBA becomes profound challenge to traditional assessment

		qualifications and work-based training at diverse levels; Jessop's idea of a national framework; competence-based assessment	confining system of vocational qualifications and work-based training at diverse levels; Jessop's idea of a national framework; competence-based assessment	
1988	Social security benefits withdrawn for 16-18 year olds Closing of MSC and merging of ED and new Department of Education from the DES	Young people could no longer 'choose' unemployment and must go into employment, youth training or further education	Rise in unmotivated young people in FE; masks unemployment rate amongst young people	FE and/or training become the 'natural' alternative to aspirations for work
1988	DES report 'Advancing A-levels' (Higginson Report)	Report criticises narrowness of A-level curriculum	DES decides not to act on the report; political maintenance of notion of A-level as 'gold standard'	A-level seen as different, better, higher than vocational alternatives
1991	NCVQ begin to design a new general NVQ DfE announces end of Diploma of Vocational Education (CGLI's alternative to CPVE) and asks NCVQ to rationalise general vocational qualifications; awarding bodies (BTEC, RSA and CGLI told to work with NCVQ)	Confusion over precise nature of remit given to NCVQ (see Chapter Six); extension of OBA into the mainstream education system	Friction and turf wars; speed of development; scale of GNVQ initiative	See Chapter Nine for discussion of implications
1992	First five GNVQs introduced at Advanced, Intermediate and Foundation levels	OBA based upon portfolios of achievement, 100% mastery of specified outcomes; external tests of 'underpinning knowledge'; unit-based structure; locally-designed assignments	Diverse issues – discussed in Chapter Six	Discussed in Chapter Six
1993	Further and Higher Education Act	FE colleges incorporated and overseen by FEFC	Major changes to funding, quality assurance and staffing structures and conditions in colleges First independent FE inspectorate set up, run by the FEFC	See Chapter Two
	Pilot of a Part One GNVQs for KS4 in schools	Units from foundation and Intermediate level GNVQ could be taken at key stage 4	See Chapter Six	See Chapter Six
	Changes to model introduced following criticism by FEFC of confusion over evidence for grading themes	GNVQ model is amplified by specifications of guidance, new grading themes	Specifications more detailed (see Appendices 5 and 17)	See Chapters Three, Six, Seven and Eight
1995	Review of problems with GNVQ assessment model by the NCVQ	John Capey, principal of Exeter College, chairs a review aimed to rationalise and simplify the model	See Chapter Six and Appendices 5 and 17	See Chapter Six

1995	DfE and ED merge to form Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)	Announces review of 16-19 qualifications to be chaired by Ron Dearing	See Chapter Six	See Chapter Nine for implications for post-compulsory education policy
1996	Pilot of a new model taken up by 90 GNVQ centres	Stronger external aspect to model; unit-based rather than generic grading; moderation of teachers' grades by Awarding bodies	See Chapter Six, Seven and Eight	See Chapters Six, Seven and Eight
1996	DfE Review of 16-19 Qualifications published	Ron Dearing proposes more convergence between A-levels and GNVQs	Emphasis on 'reliability' and 'rigour' as a basis for 'parity of esteem' between GNVQs and A-levels	See Chapter Six
1997	Schools Assessment and Curriculum Authority merged with NCVQ to form the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)	Administrative systems, offices and executive positions from SCAA. GNVQs no longer the responsibility of a cohesive, designated team	See Chapters Six and Nine	
1998	The introduction of a revised model for GNVQs, based on pilot, is delayed until 2000			
1999	DfEE announces new structure for A-levels and GNVQs; GNVQs launched as Vocational A-levels and Vocational GCSEs as part of reforms under 'Qualifying for Success' White Paper	Voluntary structure that schools, sixth form colleges and FE colleges can adopt to make units (modules) from GNVQs and A-levels easier to combine; stronger external testing in GNVQs; grading in GNVQs aligned to 5 grades in A-levels	See Chapter Nine	See Chapter Nine

APPENDIX 3 FIGURES SHOWING RECRUITMENT AND COMPLETION
IN GNVQs

Student intake and retention on Advanced GNVQs

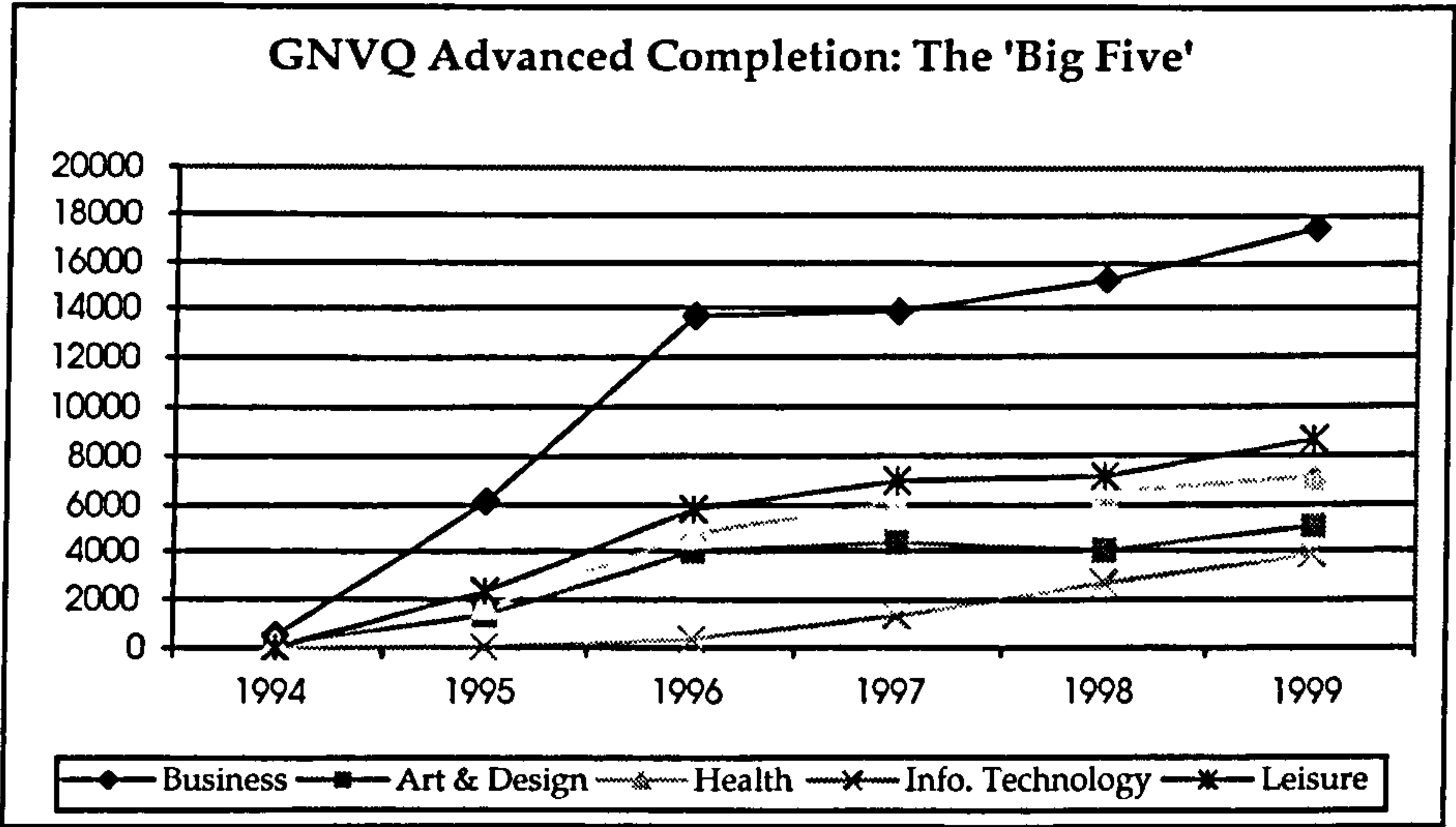
Data on student registrations for Advanced GNVQ courses are available for the years 1992 to 1995. Table 1 illustrates recruitment to GNVQs in Business, Leisure and Tourism, Art and Design and Health and Social Care.

Table 1: Advanced GNVQ student registrations 1992 - 1995

	1992	1993	1994	1995
Business	1849	19112	29584	29083
Leisure	821	6868	14041	14618
Art & Design	712	3914	7609	7815
Health	534	5974	12511	12957
Manufacture	48	177	266	231
Hospitality	0	742	2585	2395
Construction	0	725	1891	1829
Science	0	613	2136	2578
Information Technology	0	0	1740	3808
Engineering	0	0	1067	2158
Media	0	0	804	1692
Management	0	0	173	155
Distribution	0	0	54	139
Total	3964	38125	74461	79458

These courses, together with Information Technology, attracted the majority of Advanced GNVQ students in 1999 (84% of active students) and are known collectively as the ‘Big Five’.

Figure 1: Numbers of students completing Advanced GNVQ in the five largest subjects 1994-1999



In 1996 figures were produced for ‘active’ students: that is students who had completed the first year of Advanced GNVQ and who intended to complete the course

within the next academic year. This figure has replaced registration data and can be compared with figures for A-levels, where students entered for the examination are regarded as the cohort.

Table 2: Active GNVQ Advanced students 1996- 1999

	1996	1997	1998	1999
Business	22853	28415	29467	28986
Leisure	9200	13150	13502	14039
Health	8343	11993	11780	12367
Art & Design	6501	6516	6321	7125
Hospitality	1737	2569	2574	2306
Science	1448	2712	2986	3163
Construction	1172	1697	1695	1717
Information Technology	999	3539	5837	7649
Engineering	571	1860	2808	2866
Pilots *	515			
Distribution	*	128	223	251
Management	*	153	63	16
Media	*	1806	2279	2303
Manufacture	188	297	303	216
Performing Arts	0	0	197	327
Land and Environment	0	0	34	71
Total	53527	74835	80069	83402

Student achievement on Advanced GNVQ

Table 4: Number of students completing Advanced GNVQ 1994-1999

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Business	567	6084	13682	13841	15286	17541
Construction	240	72	593	824	600	842
Art & Design	230	1439	4075	4369	4143	5026
Health	185	1750	4678	6025	6414	7057
Manufacture	13		79	111	170	106
Leisure	0	2366	5771	7013	7133	8599
Hospitality	0	156	797	1123	1030	1166
Science	0	53	612	975	1187	1440
Information Technology	0	0	313	1415	2762	3959
Engineering	0	0	152	621	1208	1390
Media	0	0	143	586	1170	1252
Management	0	8	24	60	41	5
Distribution	0	0	2	34	96	139
Land and Environment	0	0	0	0	6	32
Performing Arts	0	0	0	0	100	179
Total	1235	11962	30921	36997	41346	48733

Table 5 indicates the levels of active student completion for 1998-99. Figures released by the government for 1997-8 (DfEE briefing, November 1999) indicate that, in FE

colleges, completion rates for A levels and GNVQ Advanced are very similar (83.6% and 85.5%). OFSTED figures for schools report GNVQ completions at around 80%. Reasons for discrepancy in these figures are not clear.

Table 5: Percentage of active students completing Advanced GNVQ 1998-99

	1998	1999
Art & Design	65.5	70.5
Business	51.9	60.5
Construction	35.4	49.
Distribution	43	55.4
Engineering	43.	48.5
Health	54.4	57.1
Hospitality	40.	50.6
Information Technology	47.3	51.8
Land and Environment	17.6	45.1
Leisure	52.8	61.3
Management	65.1	31.3
Manufacture	56.1	49.1
Media	51.3	54.4
Performing Arts	50.8	54.7
Science	39.8	45.5
Total	51.6	58.4

APPENDIX 4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AS BASIS FOR FIELDWORK

Policy formulation

- do different constituencies involved in policy making for GNVQs have different conceptions about autonomy and motivation?
- which constituencies have been influential in policy decisions for the GNVQ assessment system?
- what different conceptions about autonomy and motivation exist amongst different constituencies in policy design?
- how do policy makers and policy-based researchers who develop GNVQ assessments specifications formulate policy based on their stated aims?
- what debates about motivation, autonomy and assessment appeared in policy-making processes?
- what were the effects of these debates on the assessment model and its aims?
how do different constituencies attribute success or failure in aims for GNVQ assessment policy?

Policy implementation

- what ideas about autonomy, motivation and assessment do GNVQ teachers and students appear to have?
- how have teachers understood official intentions for GNVQ assessment policy?
- how far have teachers' taken account of the stated aims of GNVQ policy designers to promote autonomy and motivation?
- how do they translate these intentions, embodied in the specifications and guidance, into their day to day formative assessment practices?
- what formative assessment practices are used in a GNVQ programme and why?
- how far do teachers connect assessment activities with ideas about learning?
- to what extent do teachers' and students' assessment practices promote different types of autonomy and motivation?
- what types of autonomy and motivation seem to be prevalent and why?

Policy effects

- what evidence is there of 'low expectations' and notion of 'risk' discussed in Chapter Two?

- what evidence is there of social and constructivist dimensions to motivation and autonomy?
- what conditions inhibit the effective implementation of assessment to enhance motivation and autonomy?
- to what extent do criticisms of ‘surveillance through assessment’ have a resonance in the fieldwork?
- how has the assessment model affected teachers’ and students’ beliefs about, and understanding of, links between autonomy, motivation and assessment?
- what discernible effects does GNVQ assessment have on teachers’ and students’ assessment practices?
- what impact has the implementation of GNVQ assessment policy had on students’ approaches and attitudes to learning?

APPENDIX 5: CHANGES TO ADVANCED LEVEL GNVQ ASSESSMENT MODELS 1992-2000

Changes to Advanced GNVQs in Business 1993-2000

Model	Key features	Manageability	Cognitive Depth	Student Autonomy	Creativity and Motivation
1993 Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> portfolios of achievement grading themes emphasised process external multiple choice tests 'bolted on' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 mandatory units 25 outcomes all of which are assessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lower end of Bloom's taxonomy predominates: 'describe', 'identify', 'explain' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> language of specifications aimed at teachers heavy demands on students' procedural autonomy scope for personal autonomy at merit and distinction level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> design elements in units 3B8 and 3B2 role-play and peer assessment in unit 3B4 emphasis on local design of 'real life' assignments flexible approaches to meeting the criteria
1995 Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduction of amplification, guidance and evidence indicators summative feedback form teachers used formatively reduction in portfolio evidence 100% mastery of outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 mandatory units 29 outcomes of which only 1/3 are assessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lower end of Bloom's taxonomy predominates: 'describe', 'identify', 'explain' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased detail and technical language make specifications less clear procedural, personal and critical autonomy as 1993 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> proposals required for unit 2 proposals, role-play and assessment elements in unit 4
1996 Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduction of assessment burden, evidence indicators become 'bullets' introduction of more 'cognitively challenging' criteria externally set and moderated assignments feedback becomes summative confirmation of achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 mandatory units 8 outcomes to be assessed grades are cumulative: Distinction must encompass Merit and pass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduction of a progression from pass: 'explain' and 'describe' to merit: 'compare' and 'detailed explanation' to distinction: 'analyse' and 'appraise critically' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> redesigned for students: clarity of language and presentation improved extension of pass criteria not clear procedural autonomy embedded at Pass level critical autonomy at Distinction level for evaluating processes and subject-related issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> proposals required for distinction in unit 1 creative elements embedded in unit 5 at all levels with emphasis on role-play and peer /self-assessment possibility that teachers can merely give students specifications rather than design assignments
2000 Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> grades a, c and e replace distinction, merit and pass external testing for 1/3 total mark requirement for 100% mastery removed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 mandatory units 4 outcomes to be assessed and 2 externally set and moderated exams grades are no longer cumulative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> progression not as evident: 'analyse' used at e/pass level. comparative elements removed from outcomes, requiring only one business case study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> commitment to student understanding continues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> creative elements mainly replaced by descriptive or analytic tasks. requirements for role play and peer assessment removed hypothetical application of theory and less emphasis on 'real life'

Model	Key features	Manageability	Cognitive Depth	Student Autonomy	Creativity and Motivation
1993 Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> portfolios of achievement grading themes emphasised process external multiple choice tests 'bolted on' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 mandatory units 24 outcomes all of which are assessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lower end of Bloom's taxonomy predominates: 'describe', 'identify', 'explain' but 'analyse' appears in unit 3HSC1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> language of specifications aimed at teachers heavy demands on students' procedural autonomy scope for personal autonomy at merit and distinction level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> opportunity for rehearsal and peer assessment in unit 3HSC2 emphasis on local design of assignments flexible approaches to meeting the criteria
1995 Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduction of amplification, guidance and evidence indicators summative feedback form teachers used formatively reduction in portfolio evidence 100% mastery of outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 mandatory units 24 outcomes of which only 1/3 are assessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lower end of Bloom's taxonomy predominates in unit 1 unit 2 requires higher order skills: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased detail and technical language make specifications less clear procedural, personal and critical autonomy as 1993 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recommendations required in unit 3HSC2 opportunity for rehearsal and peer assessment in unit 3HSC2
1996 (Capey) Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduction of assessment burden, evidence indicators become 'bullets' introduction of more 'cognitively challenging' criteria externally set and moderated assignments feedback becomes summative confirmation of achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 mandatory units 10 outcomes to be assessed grades are cumulative: Distinction must encompass Merit and Pass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduction of a progression pass to merit to distinction process elements a significant feature in merit criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> redesigned for students, clarity of language and presentation improved extension of pass criteria not as clear in some units as others procedural autonomy embedded at Pass level critical autonomy at Distinction level in relation to evaluation of learning processes and/or subject related issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explicit ownership and management of research in unit 1 opportunity for rehearsal and peer assessment in unit 2 possibility that teachers can merely give students specifications rather than design assignments
2000 Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> grades a, c and e replace distinction, merit and pass external testing for 1/3 total mark 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 mandatory units 4 outcomes to be assessed and 2 externally moderated assessments. grades are no longer cumulative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> influence of Bloom's taxonomy continues process elements removed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clarity and transparency affected by the reduction of evidence indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explicit ownership and management of research in unit 1 removed. opportunity for peer assessment in unit 2 hypothetical application of theory and less emphasis on 'real life' contexts

APPENDIX 6 THE TEACHER SAMPLE

NAME	SUBJECT	UNITS IN GNVQ	COLLEG	QUALIFICATION	EXPERIENCE IN FE AND GNVQ
Caroline	Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications in Care Settings Psychology 	Riverside	Certificate in Education MSC Psychology	Five, all in GNVQ, also teaches BTEC National, unit tutor in GNVQ
Madeline	Nursing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning a Health Campaign 	Riverside	Certificate in Education Nursing and midwifery qualification	Fourteen, BTEC National and other vocational courses, unit tutor in GNVQ
Mary	Nursing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications in Care Settings Planning a Health Campaign 	Bridgeview	Certificate in Education Nursing qualification MA in Post-Compulsory Education	Five, all in GNVQ, course leader for GNVQ HSC, does not teach other courses
Neil	Sociology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sociology Social Policy 	Bridgeview	Degree in Sociology MA in Education	Fifteen, two years in GNVQ, previously A-levels, also teaches BTEC National courses, GNVQ unit tutor
Barbara	Statistics European Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication and Numeracy key skills Statistics European Policy 	Bridgeview	Certificate in Education	Twenty, seven years in GNVQ, previously CPBE, BTEC First, BTEC National, personal and unit tutor, does not teach on other courses
Gill	Financial transactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial transactions 	Bridgeview	Chartered surveyor qualification Certificate in Education	Twenty-five, seven years in GNVQ, previously A-level and BTEC National, does not teach on other courses, GNVQ course leader
Jim	Accountancy Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour and Motivation at Work Financial transactions 	Riverside	Chartered accountancy qualification Certificate in Education	Fifteen, six in GNVQ, previously HND and Management courses, BTEC National, GNVQ course leader
Jo	Business studies		Riverside	B Ed in Business Education	Five, teaches BTEC National, GNVQ unit tutor

APPENDIX 7 THE STUDENT SAMPLE

Incoming Qualification	Student : course and duration of fieldwork	University degree	Vocational training	Job	Final destination	Final Grade	Aim for Grade
A-level	Anastasia, HSC RS, yr1 and yr2	Possible		Not sure	More FE, job	M	P/M
A-level	Brittany, HSC RS, yr1 and yr2	Possible	Nursing		HE - Health Studies	D	D
GCSE	Annette, HSC RS, yr1 and yr2	Psychology			HE - Psychology	D	D
Intermediate	Louise, HSC BV, yr2 and job	No	Nursing		Care home (job)	M	M
Intermediate	Jacky, HSC BV yr1 and yr2		Nursing		Nursing	D	M/D
Intermediate	Susan, HSC BV yr1 and yr2		Nursing		Nursing	D	M
Intermediate	Jane, HSC BV yr2 only		Nursing		Not known	M	M
Intermediate	Karen, HSC BV yr2 only	No		Not sure	Care home (part-time job)	P	P/M
GCSE	Jim, BS, yr 2 only	No		Police		M	M
GCSE	Michael, BS BV yr2 university	Business			University degree	D	D
GCSE	Wendy, BS BV, yr2 only	No		Banking or accountancy		M	P/M
Intermediate	Stephen, BS BV, yr1 and yr2	Business (2 nd choice)		Not sure		M	M
Intermediate	Tracey, BS BV yr1 and yr2	No		Banking			P/M
Intermediate	Haley, BS BV yr1	No					P/M
Intermediate	Darren, BS RS, yr1 and yr2	Possible (2 nd choice)			Job - building society	D	D
Intermediate	Louise, RS, yr1 and yr2	Law			HE - Human Resources	D	D
Work	Kevin, BS RS, yr and job	Business			Trainee manager	M	D
GCSE	Naomi, BS RS, yr1 and yr2	Law			Not known	M	M/D

APPENDIX 8 THE POLICY-BASED SAMPLE

Apart from where individuals' identity is revealed by stating their official role, the headings in bold are the designations of interviewees in Chapter Six. Each interviewee is numbered at random to ensure anonymity

NCVQ OFFICIALS

- the five NCVQ officials who set up GNVQs
- Gilbert Jessup, head of research and development in NCVQ and deputy chief executive until 1997
- two lead subject officers
- NCVQ official who managed the Capey Review
- NCVQ official who evaluated the pilot of new specifications in the 'Capey' model
- John Hillier, chief executive of NCVQ 1992-1996

QCA OFFICIALS

- current head of GNVQ policy

EXTERNAL OFFICIALS

- college lecturer who helped write specifications for Advanced Business GNVQ in 1993
- development officer at the FEDA in charge of the £5 million DfE-funded support programme for GNVQs from 1995-1998
- head of FEU from 1990-1994
- head of FEDA from 1994-1997

AWARDING BODY OFFICIALS

- chief executive of the RSA Examination Board
- a test designer for BTEC between 1992-1995

INSPECTORS

- head of 16-19 inspection at OFSTED 1992-1999
- GNVQ inspector OFSTED
- lead inspector for GNVQs in the FEFC Inspectorate 1993-1998

CIVIL SERVANTS

- civil servant in ED from 1992-1995, leading GNVQ developments
- civil servant in DfE from 1993-1995, leading GNVQ developments
- civil servant in DfE from 1992-1994 leading GNVQs developments

OTHER

- Tim Boswell, Minister for Further and Higher Education from 1992-1995
- John Capey, Principal of Exeter College and member of NCVQ Council, chair of 1995 Capey Review of GNVQ Assessment

APPENDIX 9 SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK

Analysis of fieldwork (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight) and conclusions in Chapter Nine draw on data from the list here and the charts below it.

- in-depth focused interviews with 25 policy makers from a range of constituencies involved in designing, implementing and evaluating the GNVQ assessment model (see list in Appendix 8)
- a series of interviews with 9 Advanced level GNVQ teachers over two years: 12 post-observation interviews¹; 12 post-observation interviews from assessment activities (2 tutorial feedback sessions, 1 moderation of a set assignment, 1 session explaining criteria to students, 8 marking sessions with individual tutors); 8 in-depth focused interviews at the end of the study
- a seminar with 8 teachers to explore meanings of autonomy, based on a card-sort (see Appendix 14) with individual responses typed up and used as the basis for the final in-depth interview
- a series of interviews with 18 students over two years: (8 group interviews with 3-5 students – one interview at the beginning of each course at the start of the study); and 18 individual interviews (2 each with 9 students), characterised by their teachers as ‘autonomous’ and ‘motivated’ from two Advanced GNVQ courses (Health and Social Care and Business) in two FE colleges
- joint marking (participant observation) of 50 assignments covering ten Advanced GNVQ units:

Psychology, Year One – Riverside

Communications Year One – Riverside

Planning a Health Campaign – Riverside, Bridgeview

Social Policy, Year Two – Bridgeview

Sociology, Year Two - Bridgeview

Human Resources, Year One – Riverside

Business Organisations, Year One - Bridgeview

¹ I did 2 post-observation interviews with 2 teachers and 1 with the other 8.

Financial Transactions, Year Two – Bridgeview

Behaviour and Motivation at Work, Year Two – Riverside

Planning an Enterprise, Year One - Bridgeview

- a questionnaire returned by 62 of 70 (%) students on the two courses covered by the study
- a questionnaire returned by 35 of 60 (%) teachers on the same two courses in sixth form and FE colleges in the North-east

APPENDIX 9 SEQUENCE AND SCOPE OF FIELDWORK WITH STUDENTS

1. Group interviews	2. Individual interviews	3. Questionnaire to 72 students in the four courses covered by the study	4. Card sort 'seminar' with 9 students	6. In-depth individual interviews
<p>(Sept 1998 – Jan 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reasons for being on GNVQs • whether students see themselves as motivated and autonomous learners • if so, the characteristics they associate with these attributes • advantages and disadvantages of the GNVQ assessment system 	<p>(Jan 1999 – May 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discussion of feedback and grades for assignments that teachers and I marked • how they use the assessment criteria during the assignment, what they do with feedback • qualities associated with Distinction grades • views about self and peer assessment 	<p>(June 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reasons for GNVQ • end goals • advantages and disadvantages of GNVQ assessment • views about self and peer assessment • uses of assessment criteria 	<p>(June 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • types of autonomy: (a) realistic to develop; (b) that their best teachers develop with them • what motivates them • how teachers assess their work • paired discussion, group discussion • typed-up version from each individual's card sort as basis for the last interview 	<p>(November 1999-May 2000)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (based on issues arising from construct analysis) • how autonomy and motivation has changed or stayed the same since leaving Year 1 or Year 2 • impact of GNVQs on learning

APPENDIX 9 SEQUENCE AND SCOPE OF FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES WITH TEACHERS

1. Post-teaching interviews	2. Participant observation	3. Post-assessment interviews	4. Card sort 'seminar' with 8 teachers	5. In-depth individual interviews about effects of GNVQ
<p>(Sept 1998-Jan 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subject • sims • progress teachers want students to make, goals for progress during the session • factors affecting changes to goals and aims. • aspects of their activity that they would characterise as assessment during the lesson • whether classroom and/or tutorial questions are 'assessment' 	<p>(Jan 1999 – April 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • marking unit assignments (50 in total) using the official specifications • discussion with teachers (see activity 3) 	<p>(Sept 1998-March 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aims for marking and comments • purposes of assessment: uses of assessment to motivate students • aspects of assessment that are important, reasons for approaches to feedback • use of specifications and criteria • whether they look for, and encourage, autonomy through feedback, discussion of criteria etc. • purposes and types of formative feedback 	<p>(June 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual ranking of statements about a) autonomy b) motivation c) formative assessment practices • pair discussion of reasons for ranking • group discussion of issues • typed-up version of each individual's responses as basis for the final interview 	<p>(November 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • official GNVQ documents that have influenced their assessment practice • how GNVQ assessment has affected their teaching and assessment, a) values and beliefs b) practices • whether GNVQs have changed values, beliefs and practices for the worse/ better • type(s) of autonomy a) important to them and why b) possible for them to develop in GNVQs and why/why not • type of motivation a) important to them and why b) possible for them to develop in GNVQs and why/why not? • Purpose of your feedback and assessment practices

APPENDIX 10 POLICY-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Your own hopes and aims for the GNVQ

- your background, interest and official role and current role
- - how you view competing interpretations of GNVQs: to keep people out of A-levels and thereby preserve them; practical curriculum in its own right; distinctive approach to learning; wider access: which objective had precedence?
- the barriers you foresaw at the outset

2. Your own role in implementing/designing/evaluating the GNVQ assessment model.

- how have your views about GNVQ assessment changed between 1992-98 and the transition to the current pilot of new assessment specifications for Advanced level

3. How you saw the role of GNVQ assessment in students' motivation and independence.

- how you see these happening via the assessment regime: what you envisage teachers and students as 'doing', particular role of formative and diagnostic assessment
- how policy affects this in practice

4. The policy processes which translate these aims into assessment specifications and guidance for teachers.

- describe how this happens
- your perception of how decisions about assessment policy get made, who has influence inside the various processes and what affects the outcomes
- how policy was shaped; what priorities were traded off, what concessions were you prepared to concede/not: i) in the past ii) in the future
- role of research in this process (QCA and other)
- aspects lost in the development from original conception, mistake
- view of changes in the current pilot

5. Issues and areas of debate which emerged amongst GNVQ designers, civil servants, ministers, inspectors and awarding bodies in relation to the assessment model.

- the purposes of the specifications and guidance, how you intend them to be used by teachers and students
- the types of learning and pedagogy you hoped they would promote
- particular commitments you had (eg externality) that you wanted to promote particularly
- other commitments to aspects of assessment

6. Current issues affecting the new pilot model.

- resolution inside policy processes
- influences on GNVQ assessment policy over 6 years
- the effects of the transition from NCVQ to QCA
- effects of feedback from teachers and researchers on amendments in the pilot

7. Factors affecting successful interpretation of the assessment model in schools and colleges.

- your perception of what happens in practice when teachers and students try to implement the aims of GNVQ policy
- your view of the factors which affect success or otherwise
- aspects of good practice that should be spread more widely

8. Your view of future directions for the GNVQ assessment model.

- future developments
- outstanding issues still to be resolved?
- other comments and issues

APPENDIX 11 RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE FOR POST-OBSERVATION INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

1. POST-OBSERVATION INTERVIEW: AFTER A TEACHING SESSION

This draws directly Swann and Brown (1997), discussed in Chapter Five.

- a) teachers will be asked not to depart from what they normally do or to worry about judgements and evaluation from the researcher: the interest is in coming to understand more about how teachers see students, teaching and learning
- b) open-ended questions (as opposed to specific questions about the research) provide an opportunity to gain access to the ways in which teachers construed their own teaching and the students' learning
(NB. open-ended questions will be used again after the observation of an assessment activity)
- c) questions focus on what went well, which students they had in mind during the session, what did you do when (Swann and Brown point out that questions like 'What do you do when..' tend to elicit generalised and idealised accounts).: *"ways of stimulating teachers to articulate their own values, aspirations and expectations, with direct references to their practices and decision-making processes in their classrooms"* (p94)

POST-OBSERVATION INTERVIEW

- i) Can you tell me what you feel went well in the session?
- ii) What were your general aims?
- iii) Which students were you particularly pleased with and why?
- iv) Which responses to activities/questions were you pleased with and why?
- v) Ideas about particular 'good' students, those you might class as 'autonomous' or 'motivated' and why.
- vi) What was important in relation to your subject in this session?

What do you want students to learn about your subject?

- vii) Can you think of a student who is what you would call 'autonomous'? If so, what characteristics does she or he have?

Is 'autonomy' related to motivation: can you think of a motivated student? What is s/he like?

2. POST-ASSESSMENT OBSERVATION INTERVIEW

After a tutorial/portfolio/marking assignments/returning assignments session

- i) What do you feel went well in that session?
- ii) What were your general aims in questions/feedback comments?
- iii) Which students responded well and why?
- iv) How did you plan the assessment?
- v) Your experience of assessment; other courses you have assessed on, where you have learned about assessment (e.g. colleagues, teacher training etc. (*learning career*))
- vi) What do you see as the aims of the assessment you do?
- vi) What other things do you do that you call assessment?
- vii) How do you feel about assessment

2. GENERAL INTERVIEW: GNVQs

i) Involvement in GNVQs, why GNVQs, current role in GNVQs

ii) What do you see as the main aims behind GNVQs?

How do you feel about these aims?

Have you come across any 'official' statements about the aims of GNVQs? Or heard them from colleagues, co-ordinators etc.?

iii) The effects GNVQs have had on your subject

Are there aspects of learning which you think GNVQs in your subject *ought* to cover?

Which does it cover well? Which not?

What do you think of the unit assessment specifications?

iv) GNVQS aim to make students more autonomous and motivated in their learning and they aim to do this through the assessment system you have to use

Do GNVQs affect motivation and autonomy, in your view? If so, how? If not, why not?

Do you think that GNVQ assessment has affected how you view the idea of helping students to become more autonomous and motivated?

Can you think of students who do become more autonomous and motivated because of GNVQs?

What other things make them motivated and autonomous, in your view?

v) The main purposes of assessing students

What do you see as the main purposes of assessing students in courses you taught before GNVQs, in GNVQs themselves; are there differences in the purposes? If so, what?

vii) Assessment in GNVQS

a) assessment activities: could you talk me through all the activities you do on GNVQs that you would call 'assessment'? Has GNVQ improved how you assess students? If so, how? If not, why not?

b) tutorials/reviews of progress/portfolios/marking students' work: could you tell me what you hope the students will get out of these processes? Can you think of a student who has benefited from GNVQ assessment? Not?

c) using the criteria: how do you use the grading criteria? How do you arrive at an idea of the standard?

d) one of the aims of GNVQ assessment is that it makes the process more democratic and more of partnership between teachers and students

Did you know that this is one of the 'official' aims? What do you think of this aim in relation to you and your students?

Would you say that you treat assessment more as a partnership than you did before GNVQs? What things undermine the possibility of a partnership?

APPENDIX 12 TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE
(font reduced for appendix)

1. YOUR TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCE

1.1 How long have you been involved with Advanced Level GNVQs?

- 0-1 year☐
- 1-3 years☐
- 3-8 years☐

1.2 What units do you teach in Advanced GNVQ?

.....

.....

.....

1.3 In addition to the Advanced GNVQ, what other teaching/assessing do you do? (Please tick more than one if appropriate)

- a. Intermediate GNVQ

b. Foundation GNVQ

c. A-level (please state subject(s))

d. Access to Higher Education

e. BTEC National Certificate/Diploma

f. NVQs

g. Other (please indicate course)
- ☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐
- ☐
-

2. YOUR GNVQ RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 Please indicate which responsibilities you have for the Advanced GNVQ (tick more than one if appropriate)

- a. course co-ordinator

- Year One

- Year Two

b. personal tutor

- Year One

- Year Two

c. key skills lecturer

- Year One

- Year Two

d. subject lecturer

- Year One

- Year Two
- ☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

3. YOUR VIEWS ABOUT THE AIMS OF THE GNVQ ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The GNVQ assessment system is supposed to:

- a. encourage students to take more responsibility for planning/ managing/evaluating their work

- b. to see themselves as ‘lifelong learners’
- c. to work with their teachers to set targets and review achievements
- d. to become independent learners

3.1 In your view which aim is:

the most worthwhile	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the most realistic for your own students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the most difficult to achieve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the easiest to achieve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.2 Do you have your own aim for the GNVQ assessment system? If so, please indicate

.....

.....

.....

4. USING THE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA WITH YOUR STUDENTS

Having clear criteria is supposed to make GNVQ students more able to improve the quality of their work.

Please say how far you agree with the following statements about the assessment criteria and add any comments you would like to make about the statements. (Please tick as appropriate)

4.1 The criteria are too complex to use:

strongly agree ☐ agree ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree ☐

4.2 My students use the criteria to plan and evaluate their work:

strongly agree ☐ agree ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree ☐

4.3 The criteria are off-putting for all but the most motivated students:

strongly agree ☐ agree ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree ☐

4.4 I use the criteria to check that students have covered all the relevant points:

strongly agree ☐ agree ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree ☐

4.5 The criteria place a strait-jacket on students’ creativity in my subject:

strongly agree ☐ agree ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree ☐

4.6 The criteria have made me a better marker:

strongly agree ☐ agree ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree ☐

If so, please say how:

If not, please say why not:

- 4.7 I give the students as much help as I can so that they understand what the criteria are asking of them:

strongly agree ☐ agree ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree ☐

- 4.8 I make the students work out for themselves what the criteria mean and only help them when necessary:

strongly agree ☐ agree ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree ☐

5. WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR STUDENTS?

Please think about 2 of the most motivated students in your Year 2 Advanced group.

- 5.1 What characteristics/qualities do they seem to have (please indicate more than one of the statements below, if appropriate)

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| a. | attend regularly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | are willing/confident to participate in my lessons | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. | seem to be aiming for a clear 'end goal' after the GNVQ has finished | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. | seem to enjoy being a student | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. | strive to do their best work in assignments | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. | find the subject I teach interesting in its own right | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. | want to get through the course as efficiently as possible (without necessarily striving to do their best!) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. | regularly get 'Distinction' grades | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- 5.2 What seem to be the main barriers to motivation for your students? (Please tick more than one of the statements below if appropriate)

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| a. | the assessment criteria | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | the GNVQ workload | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. | factors outside college (e.g. jobs, social life) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. | problems with other students in the group | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. | other (please say what) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. WHAT MAKES YOUR STUDENTS 'AUTONOMOUS LEARNERS'?

Please think about 2 of your GNVQ Year Two students who you might class as 'autonomous'

- 6.1 What characteristics/qualities do they seem to have? (Please tick more than one statement below if appropriate and comment if you would like to amend them in any way)

- | | | |
|----|---|--------------------------|
| a. | they plan their assignments and workload efficiently | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | they manage their time well to accommodate college and external commitments | <input type="checkbox"/> |

-
- c. they make good use of the library and college facilities ☐
 - d. they are able to locate and use other sources of information ☐
 - e. they don't ask me for help ☐
 - f. they are able to think of, and ask questions to help them get a better understanding in my subject ☐
 - g. they seem to be able to recognise their strengths and weaknesses in their assignment work ☐
 - h. they set targets and goals
 - i. personal ☐
 - ii. assignment-related ☐
 - iii. future ☐
 - i.
they aim for a particular grade and build their assignment around it ☐
 - j.
they really try to get to grips with the Distinction criteria ☐
 - k. they go beyond what is required of them ☐
 - l. they are not afraid to question things in my subject ☐

7. HOW YOU ASSESS THE STUDENTS' WORK

7.1 When you mark assignments, is evidence of 'autonomy' something that you consciously look for?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If 'yes', please say what type of evidence you look for:

.....

7.3 Do you write comments on the actual text of students' work?

YES ☐ NO ☐

7.4 If 'yes', what is the purpose of your comments? Please tick as appropriate:

- a. to correct factual errors ☐
- b. to make students think more 'critically' about the content and issues covered by the assignment ☐
- c. to correct spelling and grammar ☐
- d. Other (please say what) ☐

7.5 Do you write comments in the box on the assignment sheet?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If 'yes', what is the purpose of your comments? (Please tick as appropriate)

- a. to justify the grade I have given ☐
- b. to reward students' effort ☐
- c. to point out where they could improve next time ☐
- d. to highlight weaknesses ☐

7.6 If 'no', please indicate reason(s) for not putting comments on this sheet:
.....

7.7 Do you follow written comments with oral feedback?

- a. to the whole group YES ☐ NO ☐
- b. to individuals YES ☐ NO ☐

7.8 If 'yes', what is the purpose of this feedback?

- a. to justify grades ☐
- b. to motivate students to aim higher next time! ☐
- c. to clarify any misunderstandings ☐
- d. to highlight particularly good examples of work ☐
- e. to highlight particularly poor examples of work ☐

8. STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO YOUR FEEDBACK

This section looks at how students use your feedback on their work. Please think of your most motivated students.

8.1 Students seem to take account of feedback on their work:
never ☐ sometimes ☐ often ☐ always ☐

8.2 Students use feedback to improve their work:
never ☐ sometimes ☐ often ☐ always ☐

8.3 Students use the feedback to improve their understanding of 'Distinction' criteria
never ☐ sometimes ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Please now think of your most 'autonomous' students:

8.4 Students seem to take account of feedback on their work:
never ☐ sometimes ☐ often ☐ always ☐

8.5 Students use feedback to improve their work:
never ☐ sometimes ☐ often ☐ always ☐

8.6 Students use feedback to improve their understanding of the 'Distinction' criteria:
never ☐ sometimes ☐ often ☐ always ☐

9. BARRIERS TO AUTONOMY IN GNVQs

9.1 What factors inhibit students from developing their autonomy?

.....

.....

9.2 Which types of autonomy can your students develop in GNVQs? (Please tick more than one statement if appropriate)

- a. the ability to find their own sources of information ☐
- b. the ability to work unsupervised ☐
- c. awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as learners ☐
- d. awareness of their strengths and weaknesses generally ☐
- e. the ability to ask questions relating to issues in my subject ☐
- f. the ability to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions ☐

APPENDIX 13 STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

(font reduced for appendix)

NAME**COLLEGE****SUBJECT**

GNVQ YEAR 1/2

1. Please tick the *two most important* reasons for choosing the GNVQ

- a. I needed to get a qualification
- b. I wanted to do this particular subject because it interests me
- c. There was no alternative to college so I had to come
- d. My parents made me do it
- e. I wanted the college atmosphere and social life
- f. Other.....

2. Please: *tick one statement* for your destination after GNVQ

- a. another college course (which one?).....
- b. try for a job linked to the subject I'm doing on GNVQ
- c. try for a job not linked to the subject I'm doing on GNVQ
- d. try for university
- e. Other.....

3. Please say *the main thing* which you can do now which you couldn't do when you started the GNVQ.....

4. Please tick the *most important* statement below. GNVQ has made me more able to:

- i. know what subject interests me the most
- ii. set my own targets for learning
- iii. set my own targets for life outside college
- iv. know what my strengths and weaknesses are
- v. be more confident in finding out about subjects on the course
- vi. be more analytical about topics in the subjects on my course
- vi. Other.....

5. One aim behind GNVQs is to make students more independent in the ways they learn and more motivated to learn.

- | i. Have GNVQs achieved this aim for you? | | YES/NO |
|--|------------|--------|
| 1 | Yes | |
| 2 | No | |
| 3 | Don't know | |

ii. If yes, please say how.....

.....

iii. If not, please say why not.....

.....

6. a. what aspect of the course do you like most?.....

.....

7.. what aspect of the course do you like least?.....

.....

8. Please tick *one statement which most fits* with your motivation on the GNVQ

i. I need to get the qualification

ii. the subjects I do are interesting

iii. it is easier than A-levels

iv. it has the same recognition as A-levels

v. Other (please say if there is another reason not in this list).....

.....

9. Please tick *the two most important* things which get in the way of your motivation to do your best work in GNVQ?

i. social life

ii. work commitments

iii. family commitments

iv. too much workload on the GNVQ

v. boring work on the GNVQ

vi. getting good grades is too hard

10. What skills or strengths do you need to be an independent student on GNVQ? *Please list two things* which are important

.....

.....

11.. What stops you from being independent in GNVQ? *Please tick the two most important*

i. I don't really know what's required of me to get good grades

ii. I don't get enough help to know what to do

iii.The work is too hard at Merit and Distinction grades

iv. I just want a Pass so Merit and Distinction grades don't really bother me

v. I don't like to ask teachers for help with my work

12. Which of the following aims for GNVQ assessment is important to you? Please tick *the two statements* which you agree most with:

- a. to make us take more responsibility for planning and managing our own work
- b. to motivate us to take more qualifications in future
- c. to make us set targets and evaluate our strengths and weaknesses
- e. to make the course easier to pass
- f. to help us get better grades
- g. Other.....

13. What is the main advantage of the way that you are assessed on GNVQ?.....

.....

14.. What is the main disadvantage of the way you are assessed on GNVQ?.....

.....

15. Using the assessment criteria. Please circle how often you do the following

a.I check I have covered everything in the bullets

NEVER/SOMETIMES/OFTEN/ALWAYS

b. I try to work out what skills I need to show to get a particular grade

NEVER/SOMETIMES/OFTEN/ALWAYS

c. I assess my own work before handing it in

NEVER/SOMETIMES/OFTEN/ALWAYS

d. I try to aim for at least a Merit

NEVER/SOMETIMES/OFTEN/ALWAYS

e. I ask my friends or someone outside college to use the bullets to assess my work

NEVER/SOMETIMES/OFTEN/ALWAYS

f. I use the bullets to assess a friend's work before they hand it in

NEVER/SOMETIMES/OFTEN/ALWAYS

16. What skills and strengths do you need to show to get a Distinction?.....

.....

17. How often do you aim for a Distinction? Please circle the one that applies to you:

NEVER/SOMETIMES/OFTEN/ALWAYS

c. What stops you aiming for a Distinction?.....

.....

**18. Think of teachers who help you to improve your work by how they mark your assignments
Please put the statements below in order of importance.**

- i. They tell me exactly what I have to do to put it right
- ii.. They give me the confidence to work out for myself what to do to put it right
- iii. They tell me my strengths and weaknesses so that I can judge my work for myself

19. How do you use the feedback you get from teachers on your assignments? Please circle the statement which applies to you:

- i. I read their comments

NEVER/SOMETIMES/USUALLY/ALWAYS

- ii. I use their comments to improve the next assignment

NEVER/SOMETIMES/USUALLY/ALWAYS

- ii. I make sure I go and see the tutor to discuss the comments

NEVER/SOMETIMES/USUALLY/ALWAYS

APPENDIX 14 CARD SORT ACTIVITY TO EXPLORE IDEAS ABOUT AUTONOMY, MOTIVATION AND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY

Teachers and students were given a set of cards with statements about autonomy, motivation and assessment feedback. These related to the typology discussed in Chapter Three, with autonomy statements presented from my perspective as procedural, personal and critical and motivation statements presented as intrinsic and extrinsic. (The more precise categories offered by Prenzel et al, and discussed in Chapter Three, were not available to me at the time of the card sort). Participants did not hear the categories until after they had done the individual exercise described next. Student terminology is given in brackets and the statements are set out in the student example of responses given after this outline of the activity.

1. Participants had to sort and code the cards with autonomy statements as:

- realistic for students (you) to achieve
- unrealistic
- possible to achieve but there are barriers

2. They then had to re-sort for those which, as a teacher, they (your best teacher):

- set out to develop with students (you)
- does not develop with students (you)

3. In pairs, participants discussed similarities, differences, reasons while I listened and observed.

4. Participants then had to re-sort autonomy categories as:

- realistic for most students in my group
- unrealistic for most students in my group

1. Participants then sorted and coded about motivation as:

Applying to the most motivated and autonomous student (me)
Those which don't apply

2. In pairs, participants discussed similarities, differences, reasons, as above.

3. Participants coded and sorted statements about formative assessment practices as:

Those which I (the teacher I learn most from) use
Those which I (the teacher I learn most from) don't use

7. Pair discussion as above.

8. Each participant put all coded statements into an envelope with her or his name on for typing-up as in the example below.
9. I presented a summary of different types of autonomy and motivation followed by group discussion.

An example of the typed-up version of one student’s responses to the card sort exercise to explore perceptions of the types of autonomy and motivation developed in GNVQs. The statements were the basis for a focused interview with each of 9 students who took part in the card sort activity. (Font reduced for appendix)

STUDENT – Britney, HSC, Riverside

TEACHER – Caroline, Psychology Teacher

PROCEDURAL AUTONOMY

Realistic

- I can use knowledge and information to meet the criteria specifications
- I can find my own creative sources
- I am confident with the technical language in Caroline’s unit
- I can find my own sources from suggestions that Caroline’s makes

Realistic but I don’t develop this

- I can deal with subjects if they’re broken up into tasks

Unrealistic

- I can find my own creative sources

PERSONAL AUTONOMY

Realistic

- I know my own strengths and weaknesses in relation to Caroline’s unit

Unrealistic but I don’t develop this

- I know my own strengths and weaknesses in other aspects of my life

Unrealistic and I don’t develop it

- I manage my life well to fit in GNVQs

CRITICAL AUTONOMY

Realistic and I develop this skill

- I can see that some issues in Caroline's subject are controversial
- I can challenge things which are taken for granted in Caroline's unit
- I can work out how to go about assignments without needing help

Realistic but I don't develop this

- I understand some of the ethical issues which come up in Caroline's unit

Possible and I can develop it

- I can think of questions to ask Caroline which helps me to understand the subject better
- I can make connections between topics in Caroline's unit for myself

Possible but I don't develop it

- I understand how topics in Caroline's unit fit into a wider context

Unrealistic and I don't develop it

- I can relate ethnical issues to myself and think of how I would deal with them
- I can find my own creative sources

MOTIVATION

This applies to me

Introjected

- I aim for the highest grades (all) most of the time
- I am motivated by an end goal after GNVQ
- What motivates me most is good qualifications, going to university and earning good money for all the hard work over the years

Identified

- I really hate failing my assignments and will try to avoid this if I can
- I am motivated by trying to improve my grades

Intrinsic

- I am motivated by learning and by improving my skills and knowledge
- I love being a student and getting on well with staff (social)
- I like the course
- I think my achievement is caused by my own efforts
- I care about the achievement of others in the group (social)
- I put in maximum effort for everything

Interested

- In my GNVQ, I tend to set tasks to push myself

This does not apply to me

- Being a student is not very important in my life
- I don't really want to be a student at all
- I love being a student but I don't necessarily strive for my best effort
- I don't mind getting a fail; I see it as a challenge to do better
- I tend to pick tasks which won't risk a fail
- I am mainly motivated to get the qualification
- I think my achievement is affected by whether the work is hard or easy
- I think that how well you do depends on your ability (intelligence and skills)
- I work out what I have to do to get through with minimum effort
- I am motivated by the rest of my group doing well or badly
- I go along with everything but not very enthusiastically
- I put in maximum effort only for the bits I like

APPENDIX 15 CATEGORIES FOR CODING POLICY FIELDWORK DATA

Normative

- a. 'standards (as a moral/professional issue)
- b. progressivism (student-centred v. teacher-centred)
- c. vocationalism (v. academic)
- d. academic knowledge
- e. explicit specification
- f. 'these students', 'this type of student'
- g. parity of esteem
- h. motivation
- i. autonomy

Symbolic

- a. war imagery: 'battle royals', 'iron cabinets', 'hawks', 'doves'
- b. religious imagery: 'zealots', 'mission'
- c. norms: 'the way we do things', 'being pragmatic', 'reality is'
- d. sides and divisions: purists, revisionists, fixers, go-betweens

Rationale

- a. key actors
- b. key events
- c. responses to perceived problems
- d. evolution of policy as logical response
- e. policy cynicism/pragmatism/reality

Technical

- a. imperatives of the model
- b. 'standards' : criterion-referenced/norm-referenced
- c. technical, specialist language

Political

- a. 'hard core' principles
- b. expendable trade-offs
- c. disputes
- d. 'the powerful', 'the powerless'
- e. being seen to act
- f. unanticipated problems

Personal

- a. defending roles and reputations
- b. setting scores
- c. highlighting own role

Organisational

- a. rivalry: 'sides'
- b. motives (survival, 'holding a line')
- c. processes and interactions in policy and styles
- d. ethos and styles (e.g. civil servants v. NCVQ officials)
- e. 'not designed here'

APPENDIX 16 CATEGORIES FOR CODING COLLEGE FIELDWORK DATA

Rational

- a. responses to policy : injunctions that must be followed (QCA, awarding bodies, institutional managers)
- b. responses to student intake : motivation, attitude, ability
- c. responses to institutional change : resources, conditions, morale

Technical

- a. imperatives of the assessment model : processes, rules, requirements
- b. imperatives of quality assurance: standards' moderation, inspection

Organisational

- a. culture and dynamics of teams : values and beliefs, commitment to GNVQs
- b. perception of competence in GNVQs (own and colleagues')
- c. subject ethos/tradition
- d. processes of learning about GNVQs : dialogue, shared problems

Political

- a. perceptions of power within the institution and in relation to GNVQ policy : 'our team leader', 'the management', 'our moderator' (awarding body), 'the internal verifier'
- b. perceptions of personalities : team, managers, the awarding body

Normative

- a. aims/goals for students : getting the qualification, personal development, 'nice' assignments, critical thinking
- b. types of motivation
- c. types of autonomy
- d. purposes of assessment : diagnostic, formative, summative
- e. subject values and commitment

Symbolic

- a. the technical language: bullets, PCs, tracking, checking, verifying
- b. distance from regulation: *the* moderator; GNVQ-speak;
- c. closeness to students: 'my' students, 'our' students
- d. 'nice' assignments

INTERIM THEMES

Before finalising the list of categories for analysing college data, outlined above, I generated an interim list based on the typology in Chapter Three around Swann and Brown's themes (1997). The italicised phrases are Swann and Brown's, the bullet points were initial themes from the pilot and first interview on 19 October 1998.

desirable student activities teachers want to establish and maintain

- subject-related content
- subject-related critical engagement with content
- meeting the GNVQ assessment summative requirements (checking, tracking, covering)
- discipline and control
- reflection on learning and its links to assessment

progress they want students to make

- 'getting through the subject' - content
- developing cognitive skills in the subject
- meeting the requirements (summative) checking, tracking etc
- becoming more autonomous (procedural, personal, critical)
- being motivated (extrinsic/intrinsic)

actions to establish and maintain these

- transmission ; the requirements of the assessment regime: 'checking', 'listing ', 'tracking', 'covering' - these are GNVQ words that teachers and students use) and/or the subject content and skills
- transaction: around the requirements (negotiating how to best achieve them) and/or the subject or other aspects of the process
- transformation: to help students move on in terms of the subject, their attitudes to learning (personal and critical autonomy)

conditions affecting aims and actions

- students' motivation and attitude: affected by the GNVQ but also by material and social conditions affecting students (money, family, employment etc)
- resources: time to prepare and 'get through everything'
- strictures imposed by the college eg. number of hours in the learning centre, teaching hours etc
- implicit and explicit expectations of students' ability, motivation etc
- feelings about the unit specifications

20th October 1998

APPENDIX 17 AN OUTLINE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN GNVQS (1990-2000)

Development		Focus		Organisations or individuals involved	
Year					
1990	Internal meetings in NCVQ		Discussion of 'ideal' assessment principles, in a new qualification		Gilbert Jessup and NCVQ officials
1991	Tim Eggar's briefing letter to NCVQ		Internal, formal launch of GNVQ developments		NCVQ officials and a newly formed General Policy Committee (GPC)
(May)	White Paper 'Education and Training for the 21 st Century'		Public launch of initiative by DES, limited funding from ED		GNVQ team in NCVQ, awarding bodies
1992	Consultation amongst diverse constituencies about principles for the assessment model		Assessment principles and characteristics of the qualification		Colleges, awarding bodied, inspectorates, FEU, subject and professional associations
1992			First model of assessment specifications		GPC, subject groups convened by NCVQ
	DES instruction to include grading and external tests		Design of grading themes, delegation of the design of external tests to awarding bodies		NVQ, awarding bodies, subject groups
1993	Launch of first GNVQ		5 subjects, Advanced and Intermediate level		
1994	Smithers' report for 'Dispatches', Channel Four		Public criticism of quality of GNVQs Notion of 'standards' and 'rigour' gain ground as a result of the publicity		Smithers, via Channel 4 Television, wide press coverage.
1994	First FEFC inspection report		Informal feedback to NCVQ about burden of assessment		GPC, and on Radio 4's 'Today' programme FEFC chief inspector defends quality of GNVQs
1994	Report for the Employment Department by Alison Wolf		Internal criticism about quality of grading and burden of bureaucracy on teachers and students		Civil servants, NCVQ Officials
May 1995	Following FEFC and Wolf's reports, preparation for revised assessment specifications in Sept 1995 had started before the '6-point plan' to improve GNVQs, announced by Tim Boswell at CBI Conference in May		Public emphasis in Boswell's speech was on burden and manageability of assessment rather than on 'reliability' and 'standards'		Gilbert Jessup sets up Capey committee in response to Boswell's speech
Sept 1995	Revision to model. Much more detailed assessment guidance issued to teachers		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• requirement for total coverage removed• clear rules for allocation of final grades• introduce external element to portfolio assessment• review to balance and relationship of internal and external verifiers		Gilbert Jessup, NCVQ and awarding bodies

May -Nov 1995	Review of assessment by John Capey's committee Report published November	Shift in emphasis from early principles of valid 'standards' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> manageability of assessment: specifications reduced grading themes integrated into units attention to cognitive/intellectual skills in Distinction criteria external tests (short answer) externally set and moderated assignments 	Representatives from UCAS, FEDA, OFSTED, FEFC inspectorate, teachers, awarding body verifiers, universities
Nov 1995	First OFSTED report on Advanced GNVQs in schools	Criticisms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> poor quality work compared to A- levels poor reliability of grading 	Informal meetings OFSTED and civil ministers, discussion in GPC
1995	DfEE sets up Dearing Review of 16-19 qualifications	Review of assessment issues across 16-19 curriculum.	Ron Dearing liased closely with John Capey
Autumn 1995-May 1996	NCVQ design the pilot of new model in light of Capey's report	Rapid growth of NCVQ officials working on GNVQs, first large injection of public funding	NCVQ and awarding body subject groups
Sep 1996	Pilot of new 'Capey' model in 90 centres	New forms of moderation and shift in emphasis within the assessment regime (see above)	Institutions, NCVQ officials, awarding body verifiers
1996	Publication of second FEFC inspection report on GNVQs in colleges	FEFC concerns with 'standards of achievement' and 'reliability' move from burden/ manageability closer to OFSTED's interpretation of problems with reliability.	Informal OFSTED meetings with civil servants, GPC before publication of 1996 report
1996	Second OFSTED report (on Part 1 GNVQs in schools)	OFSTED voice concerns about GNVQ at key stage 4	
1997	GNVQ Scrutiny Report published by NCVQ	Following a review of consistency in teachers' grading decisions (Goff, 1996), NCVQ develop a monitoring programme to improve teachers' reliability in grading	NCVQ officials
October 1997	SCAA and NCVQ merge to form QCA.		Gilbert Jessup leaves NCVQ; many GNVQ designers from NCVQ take on new roles in QCA
October 1997	FEDA GNVQ Survey report	GNVQs confirmed as route to HE and to employment, with reservations Parity of esteem with A levels questioned	FEDA, Nuffield Foundation, Institute of Education
1997	Publication of third OFSTED report	Continued criticism of 'standards' and concerns about Part 1 GNVQs in school	
1999	DfEE/FEDA report on retention	Reducing demands of portfolio could improve retention	
Sept 1999	FEFC/OFSTED report on assessment pilot	4 areas of recommendation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> specifications: fewer units and more global summative assessment assessment: reducing the burden, increasing 'rigour' in testing to achieve parity with A levels standards moderation in a national moderation system staff development, training and guidance 	QCA officials, awarding bodies
2000	'Vocational A-levels' replace GNVQs, based on revisions to the 'Capey' model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduced assessment burden external assessment now forms one third of summative requirement new grade criteria 	QCA officials, awarding bodies

[illegible]

APPENDIX 18 RAYMOND WILLIAMS' ANALYSIS OF THE WORD 'STANDARDS' (WILLIAMS, 1983, p296-299)

Standard, in the singular, is a complicated but not especially difficult word. The same is true of its ordinary plural. But **standards** is also a case of an exceptional kind of plural – what can be called a plural singular – in which the plural form covers a singular reference; other common examples are *morals* and *values*.

Standard is etymologically complicated. Its main development was by aphesis (loss of an initial letter) from fw *estaundart*, AN, *estendart*, oF, rw *extendere*, L – stretch out (which more directly led to *extend* and *extension*). In its transitional forms *standardum*, *standardus* – it applied this root sense to the flag (as still in **Royal Standard**) stretched out from its pole (from C12). But from C13 it acquired the different sense of an erect or upright object, perhaps from association with the display of flags, more probably from confusion with the noun from *stand*, *stander*, which underlies certain modern uses (**standard lamp**, **standard rose**), in a different physical sense. The most interesting modern sense, in the range from 'a source of authority' to 'a level of achievement', developed in C15, probably from association with the **Royal Standard** as marking a source of authority. It was widely used in the precise context of weights and measures: the **standard foot**. But it was also extended to other matters, with the general sense of an authoritative example of correctness. Thus in C15 there was reference to a **standard book**, in alchemy. In eC18, Shaftesbury wrote influentially of the need for a **standard** of TASTE (q.v.), arguing that 'there is really a standard ... already, in exterior *Manners* and *Behaviour*' (*Miscellaneous Reflections*, III, 1; 1714).

All these uses have continued, but in C19 there were some significant developments. In mC19 there was the curious case of **Standard English**: a selected (class-based) use taken as an authoritative example of correctness, which, widely backed by educational institutions, attempted to convict a majority of native speakers of English of speaking their own language 'incorrectly'. There was the prescription, also in education, of certain levels of competence – **standards** – in reading, writing and arithmetic; in one period these were factors in the calculation of teachers' pay. Classes aiming at these levels of competence were described, in elementary education, as **Standards** (Two to Six). The word was much emphasised as a term of assessment or grading, and was more generally associated with a concept of graded progress within a hierarchy (cf. the contemporary phrase *the educational ladder*, probably introduced by T. H. Huxley and applied in the *board* – controlled by an *Educational Board* – schools).

From this period, **standards** both as an ordinary plural and as a plural singular became common. In many contexts the **standards** thus grouped could be precisely stated, as still in the **British Standards Institution**. It was also natural that this use should be extended to matters in which less precise measurement was possible but in which, on demand, quite specific levels of attainment or competence could be exemplified or described. These are the ordinary plurals. The plural singular is the quite different use where the reference is essentially CONSENSUAL (q.v.) ('we all know what real standards are') or, with a certain deliberate vagueness, suasive ('anyone who is concerned with standards will agree'). It is often impossible, in these uses, to disagree with some assertion of **standards** without appearing to disagree with the very idea of quality; this is where the plural singular most powerfully operates. Some comparable cases can help us to understand this. 'A person of no *morals*' can

mean a person with no moral sense or a person whose ideas or actions are at variance with current local norms. 'A concern for *values*' can mean a concern to distinguish relative values or to uphold certain (consensual) valuations. If we think about common phrases like *Western values* or *University standards* we can see the variation fairly clearly. Each phrase can be further defined, in some uses. But since *Western civilization* is not only a TRADITION (q.v.) but a complex and historically varied social process, containing radical disagreements and conflicts as well as intellectual and practical agreements, and since *universities*, while at any given time they have certain precise standards, also change these and disagree about them and vary between different societies and periods, it is soon apparent, by the character of any further definition, or by the kind of response to a request for it, whether *values* and *standards* are true plurals, grouping a number of specific positions and judgements, or plural singulars, in which a generalising version of the essence of a civilisation or a university is being projected as if it were a specific grouping of certain defined *valuations* and *standardisations*. It is very significant that the popular use of *standards* – laudatory – is at odds with a popular use of *standardisation* – derogatory. *Standardisation* came into use in 1C19, from science (standardising the conditions of an experiment) and then industry (standardising parts). It is not controversial in these uses, but in its application to matters of mind and experience it has been widely resisted – 'people can't be *standardised*', 'teaching mustn't be *standardised*' – by, among others, those who insist on the 'maintenance of *standards*'. This odd usage probably depends on exploiting the range of senses from *Royal Standard* (respectful) to *standard foot* (all right in its place but here inappropriate). The power of the plural singular always depends on its not being spotted as a singular. If it is not spotted, it can be used to override necessary arguments or to appropriate the very process of valuation and definition to its own particular conclusions.

A further note is necessary on the phrase *standard of living*. This is now common but sometimes difficult. Its earliest form, from mC19, was *standard of life*, and this is still often used interchangeably. Yet as we realise when we think about *standard*, the term seems to imply a defined level or a necessary level, rather than, as in its now common use, a general condition or an averaged condition. It was first used in the strict sense of *standard*: *standard of life* meant the necessary level of income and conditions to maintain life satisfactorily. (This was of course argued about, and could vary in different groups, times and places, but it had a precise sense when it was first used in the campaign for a minimum wage: a *standard* would be set, and a wage could be judged by reference back to it.) This was *standard of life* in a defining and retrospective (referential) sense. But the phrase developed (subsequent to its definition, for example, in OED) towards its now more common meaning: the income and conditions we actually have. As it lost the measurable reference of *standard* it retained, nevertheless, a sense of measurement. There has been controversy whether a *standard of life* or *living* can really be measured, while at the same time statistics of income, consumption, and so on have been used to define it. *Standard Past*, we might say, has been replaced by *Standard Present*. But there is also a use which draws on another sense of *standard*: not the agreed measure but, metaphorically, the flag: the *standard* we set ourselves; proper *standards* of health care; a proper *standard* of living. This is *Standard Future*: the old measures, or the existing grades, are inadequate, and we will aim at something better. It is a very interesting use. Instead of referring back to a source of authority, or taking a current measurable state, a *standard* is set, projected, from ideas about conditions which we have not yet realised

but which we think should be realised. There is an active social history in this development of the phrase.